

Helsinki Studies in Education, number 62

**Sari Eriksson**

## **Domestication of Travelling Reforms in Higher Education of Kyrgyzstan**

To be presented, with the permission of the Faculty of Educational Sciences of the University of Helsinki, for public discussion in the Auditorium 107, Siltavuorenpenger 3A, on Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> of December 2019, at 12 noon.

Helsinki 2019

**Reviewed by**

Associate Professor Ali Qadir, Tampere University

Associate Professor Martha C. Merrill, Kent State University

**Custos**

Associate Professor Janne Varjo, University of Helsinki

**Supervised by**

Associate Professor Nelli Piattoeva, Tampere University

Professor Jaakko Kauko, Tampere University

Assistant Professor Sonja Kosunen, University of Helsinki

**Official Opponent**

Research Professor Taina Saarinen, University of Jyväskylä

Unigrafia, Helsinki

ISBN 978-951-51-5664-8 (nid.)

ISBN 978-951-51-5665-5 (pdf)

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### **Abstract**

This study argues that the recent higher education reforms in Kyrgyzstan are nationally domesticated constructs of globally travelling reforms. The analyses of the post-socialist transformation visualize that this domestication takes place through discourses of quality, modernization and internationalization. Theoretically this study contributes to the wider discussion in comparative education on adopting travelling reforms in the post-socialist space and practically, it provides information to international educational organizations and local policymakers on the challenges and opportunities that affect the localization of global reforms.

I have used two recent concepts – ‘domestication’ and ‘travelling reforms’ – to analyse the post-socialist transformation in the context of Kyrgyzstan’s higher education. Notwithstanding the standard meaning of domestication in the context of taming farm animals or domestic pets, here the concept refers to local acceptance of global ideas, especially those that might have seen to be too ‘foreign’ in the past. (Alasuutari & Qadir 2014). The other concept used in this study is the concept of travelling reforms, by which the intended meaning refers to reforms which have ‘travelled’ to other countries and been adopted by them and adapted to local conditions (Steiner-Khamsi 2012). In Kyrgyzstan those travelling reforms are such as the Bologna Process, quality assurance and evaluation systems, and reform of independent accreditation.

Following what various scholars have already shown, I argue that post-socialist educational transformation is a contingent and complex process that is not possible to interpret through a western neoliberal education framework and by examining the process as a linear development. Thus, the theoretical approach applied in this dissertation is closely related to the studies of post-soviet education transformation and studies of domestication, in which I employ the concept of ‘domestic field battle’ to examine the localization of educational reforms (Alasuutari & Qadir 2014).

Empirically this research is based on policy document analyses of the key guiding policy documents of higher education, and interviews with the rectors of the universities and other actors from the field of higher education. The research method applied in this dissertation is the discursive analysis method.

Domestication of travelling reforms takes place through three discourses: the discourse on quality, the discourse on modernization, and the discourse on internationalization. Actors in the field utilize these discourses to justify or resist travelling reforms by referring to cultural, social, economical and historical considerations of the country. The findings of this study show that the actors in the field of higher education integrate national features into these travelling reforms. In referring to national and cultural aspects of society, actors make travelling reforms seem more adoptable for the society of Kyrgyzstan. I argue that the post-socialist education transformation is simultaneous process with global and local influences, in which travelling reforms evoke local actors consider their national beliefs, practices and identities.

Theoretically these findings have been analyzed by using Bourdieu's social field theory and notions of discursive space of social reality to understand the discursive construction of domestication of travelling reforms. In Bourdieu's framework, fields such as higher education have their own doxa, fundamental beliefs that are shared by actors. The doxa is challenged by opposing heterodoxical discourse, which simultaneously unveils the current doxa but also changes the dynamics of the doxa. This theoretical analysis unveils historical, social and cultural aspects of the higher education system of Kyrgyzstan – the local higher education system – which is evolving with global influences of travelling reforms.

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*Keywords:* Higher education, post-soviet transformation, Kyrgyzstan, comparative education, domestication

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## Liikkuvien korkeakoulureformien domestikaatio Kirgisiassa

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### Tiivistelmä

Tässä tutkimuksessa väitän, että viimeaikaiset Kirgisian korkeakoulu-uudistukset ovat paikallisesti domestikoituja käsityksiä globaaleista liikkuvista reformeista. Analyysi post-sosialistisesta koulutusmuutoksesta osoittaa, että globaalien koulutus uudistusten domestikaatio tapahtuu kolmen eri diskurssin kautta, jotka ovat laadun, modernisaation sekä kansainvälisyyden diskurssi. Teoreettisesti tämä tutkimus linkittyy laajempaan vertailevan koulutustutkimuksessa käytyyn keskusteluun tiedon tuottamisesta ja merkityksestä post-sosialistisessa muutoksessa. Kun taas käytännön tasolla tämä tutkimus antaa lisätietoa kansainvälisille organisaatioille ja paikallisille poliittisille päättäjille niistä mahdollista haasteista sekä mahdollisuuksia, jotka vaikuttavat globaalien koulutusreformien paikallistumiseen.

Tutkimuksessa hyödynnän kahta vertailevassa koulutustutkimuksessa käytettyä käsitettä: 'domestikaatio' sekä 'liikkuvat reformit'. Domestikaatiolla tarkoitetaan sosiologisessa tutkimuksessa käytettyä ymmärrystä globaalien vaikutteiden paikallistumisesta. Liikkuvilla reformeilla puolestaan viitataan muutosprosesseihin, jotka tavalla tai toisella ovat nähtävissä yhä useimmissa maissa, kuten Bolognan prosessiin, laadunvarmistus- ja arviointimekanismien käyttöönotto korkeakouluissa ja akkreditointiprosessin yksityistämiseen. Domestikaation ja liikkuvien reformien käsitteiden avulla havainnollistan sitä miten viimeaikaiset muutokset Kirgisian korkeakoulusektorilla ovat kansallisesti konstruoituja käsityksiä globaaleista koulutusmuutoksista.

Tutkimuksen lähtökohtana on, että post-sosialistinen koulutusmuutos on monimuotoinen prosessi, jota ei voida tulkita ainoastaan länsimaisten neoliberaalien käsitteistön avulla. Domestikaatio tutkimuksessa käytetty 'paikalliskamppailun' käsitteen avulla koulutusmuutoksen monimuotoisuus sekä globaalien ja paikallisten tavoitteiden ristiriita tulee näkyväksi. Analysoin tutkimustulokset hyödyntämällä Bourdieun viitekehystä 'diskursiivisen tilan sosiaalinen todellisuus', jonka avulla on mahdollista eksplisiittisesti analysoida paikallistumisen dynaamista prosessia. Bourdieun viitekehyksen mukaan kentillä, kuten korkeakoulutuksen kentällä, on oma 'doxa', yhteisesti jaettu tietoisuus, joka määrittelee kentällä mahdollisia diskursseja. Doxa tulee näkyväksi niissä tilanteissa, joissa se haastetaan ulkopuolelta tulevilla ajatuksilla, heterodoksisella diskurssilla.

Empiirisesti tämä tutkimus perustuu Kirgisian korkeakoulutuksen keskeisten ohjauspoliittisten asiakirjojen analyysiin sekä yliopistoiden rehtoreiden ja muiden korkeakoulupoliittisten toimijoiden haastatteluihin. Tutkimusaineisto on luettu hyödyntäen diskurssianalyttistä tutkimusmenetelmää.

Tämän tutkimuksen tulokset osoittavat, että globaalien korkeakoulureformien paikallistuminen tapahtuu kolmen eri diskurssin kautta. Nämä diskurssit ovat: laadun, modernisaation sekä kansainvälistymisen diskurssi. Korkeakoulutuksen toimijat hyödyntävät näitä diskursseja liikkuvien koulutusreformien hyväksymisessä tai vastustamisessa yhdistämällä perustelut kulttuurisiin, sosiaalisiin, taloudellisiin ja historiallisiin seikkoihin. Tutkimustulokset osoittavat, että korkeakoulutuksen toimijat yhdistävät kansallisia piirteitä liikkuviin reformeihin. Viittaamalla yhteiskunnan kansallisiin ja kulttuurisiin piirteisiin, toimijat yhdistävät reformit paikallisiin olosuhteisiin. Tässä tutkimuksessa väitän, että post-sosialistinen koulutuksen muutos on sekä globaalien että paikallisten vaikutteiden ylläpitämä prosessi, jossa globaalit liikkuvat reformit saavat paikalliset toimijat harkitsemaan kansallisia uskomuksia, käytäntöjä sekä identiteetin rakentumista.

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*Avainsanat:* Korkeakoulutus, post-sosialistinen muutos, Kirgisia, vertaileva koulutustutkimus, domestikaatio

# Acknowledgements

This dissertation is an outcome of a long journey, which made me cross several national borders and gave me a possibility to work among inspiring and talented people around the post-socialist space and in Finland. My warmest thanks go to everyone who has helped me during this process.

I am deeply grateful to my supervisors Nelli Piattoeva, Jaakko Kauko and Sonja Kosunen. You made this possible keeping me on track, by challenging me to think deeply and giving me high-level supervision. Without you this work would not look like it does now. I am also thankful for Professor Hannu Simola, who inspired and encouraged me to take up this challenge.

I wish to thank my Custos, Associate Professor Janne Varjo, for his support during the final steps of this dissertation and defence process. I would also like to express my gratitude to the reviewers of this dissertation Associate Professor Ali Qadir and Associate Professor Martha C. Merrill for their insightful evaluations. I also wish to thank Professor Taina Saarinen for accepting the role of opponent at the public defence of this dissertation.

I have appreciated the working conditions at the University of Helsinki at the faculty of educational sciences. Over the years I have worked from distance, but nevertheless been part of this inspiring academic community. Thank you Salla Keski-Saari for your support and all the administrative help.

I would like to thank the Aleksanteri Institute for financial support and giving me an opportunity to be part of the doctoral school. I am particularly grateful for Ira Jänis-Isokangas by including me even though the distances have been long. The staff and fellow doctoral students by the Aleksanteri Institute deserve my gratitude for their support, ideas and critique throughout the process in different seminars and summer schools.

I wish to thank Rashid Gabdulhakov for your support, constructive attitude and help with data gathering and practicalities in Bishkek.

Thank you, all the members of the research unit, focusing on the Sociology and Politics of Education (KUPOLI) in Helsinki for feedback and discussions during this process. You have been the research group, to which I have all these years been able to rely on. I highly appreciate the peer support I received from Hannele Pitkänen and Mari Simola. Thank you for your friendship as well! I owe thanks to a research group focusing on the Knowledge, Power, and Politics in Education (EduKnow) in Tampere for welcoming me into a diverse network of researchers at the final steps of this research. I have benefitted greatly from the discussions with you all!

I extend my thanks to Academy of Science for financing my mobility during the process. I am grateful to Professor Isak Froumin for giving me opportunity to be

part of the research group of higher education research at the Higher School of Economics in Moscow. This experience provided me the opportunity to finish my dissertation with the best possible support and gave me new perspectives for my future professional life.

The support and encouragement of my parents, relatives and friends all around the world has been very important during this process. A lot has succeeded thanks to you!

Finally, my biggest debt of gratitude goes to my husband Santeri and my children Laila, Varpu and Sebastian for being here for me. Sharing the everyday life with you, anywhere in the world, is what matters the most.

In Moscow 16<sup>th</sup> of November 2019

Sari Eriksson



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# 1 INTRODUCTION: DOMESTICATION AS AN APPROACH TO THE STUDY OF HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY

*“First of all, it is all about understanding. We had some old school professors. They did not want to change anything. They understood that they were academics and that they did not need any changes. They had the authority. This was the first barrier!” (B.1. No 11)*

In that quotation, a respondent from a national university presents the challenges that the higher education system of Kyrgyzstan confronted after its independence from the Soviet Union. Transformation of Kyrgyzstan from the Soviet system of education to a rapidly democratized one with extensive international cooperation has been the dominant understanding of change in an official political debate. In the context of Central Asia, Kyrgyzstan has been comparatively open in its involvement in international cooperation in the field of education since its independence in 1991 (see Engvall & Laruelle 2015). International and intergovernmental organizations (e.g. World Bank, UNICEF & the European Union) have been supporting Kyrgyzstan’s aspirations to borrow ‘travelling reforms’ (Steiner-Khamsi 2004), such as quality and evaluation reforms, policy recommendations and international agreements on education (like the Bologna Process).

As previous studies have illustrated, reforms that are considered to be ‘international’ are attractive to policymakers in post-Soviet republics of Central Asia, at least rhetorically (Silova 2010). Also, comparative publications and policy background papers by international organizations (World Bank, 2007) and transgovernmental organizations (European Commission 2017) have visualized the transformation processes in Central Asia by utilizing performance and progress indicators (e.g. the level of engagement with the Bologna Process, standardized testing and privatization). These publications not only develop common categories and a common language to support the decision-making of education policy (see Miller and Rose 2008), but also give an impression of internationally influenced education policy in Kyrgyzstan in comparison with neighboring countries. As we can see from the above quotation, the views of the actors from the field of higher education differ from the views presented in policy background papers and publications by the international actors in the field.

Earlier studies on the higher education policy of Kyrgyzstan have focused on the internationalization of higher education (Merrill 2012; DeYoung 2011), the

implementation of national testing centers (Shamatov 2010) and the quality of higher education (Merrill 2016, 2012) and more recently, studies on independent accreditation (Ryslukova 2018). As these previous pieces of research have illustrated, the context of Kyrgyzstan is complex and despite the aims of international actors, the post-socialist transformation process has not been straightforward. Much of this research has focused on the impact and implementation of travelling policies, change and global reforms at the national level and much less research is available on knowledge production on post-Soviet education systems, policies and practices. Although international educational policy influences and implemented reforms are undoubtedly part of the higher education transformation in the post-socialist countries, merely describing these processes does not create a precise picture of the current educational policy dynamics. Moreover, through Anglo-American and western oriented framework, the normative and neutral status of western hegemony is maintained and reproduced (see Chankseliani 2017).

Various comparative education approaches have explained the change in education policy on the basis of different epistemological perspectives (see Kauko & Wermke 2018). For example, in the comparative education field, the theoretical approaches of the world culture approach (Meyer at al. 1997; Meyer and Ramirez 2003), and the theory of policy borrowing and lending (Steiner-Khamsi 2004, 2012) have been used to explain the change in education policy. The world culture approach places emphasis on homogenization and presupposes that educational models and practices around the globe converge through globalization. Contrary to world culture theory, the approach to policy borrowing and lending emphasizes the local adaptations and reformulations of global education models. The studies of policy borrowing and lending are mainly focused on analyzing processes of borrowing and lending, local adaptations of global reforms and phenomenon behind the best practices, travelling reforms and international standards (Steiner-Khamsi 2012 & 2006; Waldow, 2012, 411). As the world culture approaches predicted that nearly all societies were moving toward the same point, policy borrowing and lending are interested in explaining what contributes to an increasing similarity of education systems worldwide and how this convergence of education systems takes place. For example, Steiner-Khamsi's (2010, 569) study on teacher salary reform in Kyrgyzstan shows the limitation of transnational policy transfer between educational systems:

“For the study of the policy process, an important lesson may be learned from the failed reform in Kyrgyzstan: even highly centralized systems such as Kyrgyzstan, top-down reform does not work unless power relations, social hierarchies, and norms are taken into account.”

Furthermore, Nóvoa and Yariv-Mashal (2003, 436–437) propose in their widely cited paper that the focus of comparative research in education should be on problematization rather than on facts and realities. This means that when concentrating on similarities and differences, the understanding behind the education system is restricted. Therefore, they claim that only problematization can constitute the basis for profound comparison. Simola and Rinne (2011) show that problems have direct links with both past and present and pose limitations for policy transfer:

“Problems are anchored in the present but possess a history and anticipate different possible futures. They are also located and relocated in places and times, through processes of transfer, circulation and appropriation. Furthermore, they can only be elucidated through the adoption of new zones of observation that are inscribed in a space delimited by frontiers of meaning, and not only by physical boundaries.” (Simola & Rinne 2011, 227–228).

Depending on the approach selected, we can draw quite different images of the post-socialist transformation process. Some scholars see the change as a linear continuum from socialism to neoliberal capitalism, whereby nation-states are at different stages of development (Heyneman 2004). In particular, after the end the Soviet Union some scholars and policymakers have striven to find consistency with western and post-Soviet education policy aims (Heyneman 2004; Segone 2008). Instead, some scholars believe that after the end of Soviet Union, the convergence of educational models and practices did not happen, as the process of transformation is more complex considering the cultural, social and economic issues of the nation-states:

“...when we do encounter western reforms in post-socialist education spaces – whether they have been willingly adopted as ‘best-practices’ or enforced as political conditionalities by international agencies – these travelling education policies and practices acquire new forms and different meanings as they touch down in different cultural context and become reinterpreted by local stakeholders under different conditions.” (Silova 2018, 195).

This means that in comparative education studies, researchers should pay attention to the complexities and interconnections of the multiple context within which these travelling reforms are evolving. This understanding of the context questioned the universality of western knowledge and certainty and creates multiple ways to understand the space (see Kauko & Wermke 2018; Silova, Millei & Piattoeva 2017).

The claim in this dissertation is that the borrowing of global education reforms can take place in educational discourses and practices. As previous research has repeatedly illustrated, in comparative education research the focus has been to consider the post-socialist education space with expectations that the region will eventually become like the West (Silova 2018). From this perspective Silova argues that this approach is only one possible perspective to analyze post-socialist education transformation.

“Not only does such an approach assume the superiority of western theory in researching education in other cultural context, but it also (re)produces an inevitably one-sided image of the world, while homogenizing the multiplicity of non-western realities, devaluing epistemic differences and overlooking alternative interpretations.” (Silova 2018, 194)

In response to this potential minefield, Silova (2018) suggests that in comparative studies we should rethink the purposes, methods and ethics of those studies and extend our thinking beyond the confines of western modernity to enable us to understand ambiguity of worlds and world views.

In order to meet this ambition, I have taken a new approach to the studies of post-Soviet educational translation by applying the ‘domestication’ approach, which has received less attention in the studies of post-socialist education<sup>1</sup>. Pertti Alasuutari and his research group have introduced and deployed the approach of domestication for developing a conceptual framework to understand the roles and driving forces of nation-states’ education policy actors at national and local levels, who are implementing these global reforms and practices. The domestication approach highlights the importance of the interdependency of the policy making, even if being interested in what is happening at the local level. The policy making process is globally synchronized but developed nationally with local flavors.

A process of domestication may originate and take place in several ‘fields’ (Bourdieu 2002). In a policy making process, domestic politics take place on a political field, where actors try to convince others with their interpretation of facts. Alasuutari and Qadir (2014, 11) call this a domestic field battle, when actors justify their views and demands to be the best-proposed solution for the interest of the nation. Besides using international prestige or the pressure of the transnational model, in the domestic field battle, policymakers and actors are more successful when they can depolitize politics. The domestic field battle is the process when policymakers argue why some reforms are beneficial to the country.

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<sup>1</sup> See a promising opening by Piattoeva and Gurova (2018) on domesticating international assessments in Russia.



The process of international reforms or models landing in the national policy field is not straightforward. When the domestic field battle takes place, actors who are involved in the process, represent different views, groups, political parties, professions, identities and roles. With the domestication approach, when different interests clash, arguments related to the national cultural and political traditions becomes more valuable than international experiences or facts (Alasuutari & Qadir 2014).

To be able to analyze the domestication of travelling reforms, the research data combine both policy documents issued by Kyrgyz state authorities and European Union representatives as well as interview data with policymakers and university representatives in Kyrgyzstan. Three broad research questions are pursued in this research: first, to analyze how and why Kyrgyzstan conforms to the global higher education policy trends; second, to analyze the roles and argumentation of the local actors for implementing travelling reforms for and around universities, and to compare them to the international agenda of higher education in Kyrgyzstan; and finally, to identify and interpret the discursive construction of domestication of travelling reforms in higher education in Kyrgyzstan. My overall research task is to understand:

How have the higher education discourses in Kyrgyzstan been domesticated in the context of international higher education reforms?

This study is based on the educational sociological research traditions and discourse analysis in which seeing and experiencing things are built a certain way. Higher education policies in the context of the post-Soviet region have not been studied extensively as discursive policies. Thus, the purpose of this study is to fill this gap in higher education policy studies.

The Central Asian higher education transition has been in progress for more than two decades. As we will discover later, (Chapter 4), over the past few decades, the Kyrgyzstan education system seems to have passed through a cycle of reforms. Instead of studying the implementation of these reforms, I am interested in studying the discursive construction of education transformation of travelling reforms in Kyrgyzstan. The aim of this study follows the domestication theory the perspective:

“identifying the ways in which local actors relate to the world society and engage in a field battle through which global trends and ideas are tamed to the local context. From that perspective global isomorphism is in a fact and outcome of local policy-making.” (Alasuutari & Qadir 2014, 3).

For theoretical interpretations of the findings of domestication travelling reforms, I have employed Bourdieu's theory of 'discursive space of social reality' (2002a, 2003). The framework of discursive space of social reality deepens the understanding on how local actors support and resist travelling reforms in the field of higher education of Kyrgyzstan. In the discursive space of social reality, Bourdieu (see, for example, 2002a, 164–170) focuses on how the borders of doxa are defended by orthodoxa and challenged by heterodoxa. Doxa is undisputed space, a common understanding of the current situation in the field of higher education. Questions of existence of doxa become visible in a situation in which it is interpreted critically (heterodoxy). Heterodoxa creates a critical discursive space in which undisputed space, doxa, will be challenged and questioned with argumentation and discussion. It is assumed that groups benefiting from the dominant situation try to keep as many practices as possible inside the doxa unquestioned, and therefore form an orthodoxy to argue for these doxic practices. In other words, orthodoxy seeks to legitimate the prevailing doxa. (Bourdieu 2002a, 164–170). What is thinkable and unthinkable, expressible and inexpressible, and valued or not, is the product of the field structures. Any field is 'bounded', and there is that which is included in it and that which is excluded. These factors allow the field to reach its legitimacy and this legitimation establishes a doxa (see Bourdieu 1977, 164–171). For Bourdieu, the doxa lies along a continuum between orthodoxy and heterodoxy.

Practical benefits of the study of the domestication of travelling reforms in the higher education of Kyrgyzstan relate to increasing information for policymakers about the social norms, dominant discourses, power relations and social hierarchies on the field of higher education to implement future education reforms better. Furthermore, this research not only offers a more nuanced understanding of the domestication of travelling reforms and its practical and theoretical contributions in the post-Soviet context, but also participates on the theoretical discussion of the change in the field comparative education (see Kauko, Wermke 2018). In the chapters that follow, my aim is to develop an argument to support these perceptions. Chapter 2 gives an overview of the approach of domestication and theoretical assumptions utilized in this study. Chapter 3 focuses on research solutions and research tasks. In that chapter I justify the methodological and research-related choices. In Chapter 4, the context of higher education in Kyrgyzstan is presented. In Chapter 5, I analyze the domestication of travelling reforms with the help of research data. The conclusion (Chapter 6) combines the results of earlier research, document and interview analysis with the theoretical model of domestication and is therefore able to make the dynamics of higher education of Kyrgyzstan visible. Finally, in Chapter 7, I present the discussion of the study and new research ideas.

## 2 DOMESTICATION OF TRAVELLING REFORMS

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the framing of domestication of higher education in Kyrgyzstan. The starting point for the domestication approach is the paradoxical relationship with world culture approach by John W. Meyer and his associates at Stanford University. Even if the domestication approach shares similar goals to the world culture approach in trying to understand world society, it takes a different perspective by underlining the global isomorphism as an outcome of local decision-making (Alasuutari & Qadir 2013, 3). The domestication approach (see Alasuutari & Qadir 2013) has focused more on the nation-states and national ownership in policymaking, which is not only the process whereby local actors are mindlessly copying global success stories and best practices. The domestication approach focuses on local processes through which global ideas and reforms are adopted. Piattoeva and Gurova (2018) have emphasized the importance of studying processes of localization on global governance as travelling policies become experientially domestic thorough the domestication process (Alasuutari 2015). Because of domestication, global ideas become a part of the local context and are no longer perceived as a borrowed external model (Alasuutari 2015, 11; Piattoeva & Gurova 2018).

Several comparative studies have explored the convergence of educational policies, especially of the phenomena of globalization and Europeanization of educational policies (Ball 1998, Novoa and Lawn 2002). Since the early 2000s, comparative educational research and policy have been inspired by measuring and evaluating the different education systems. The last 20 years have seen the growing emphasis and popularization of assessment and its associated facilities in the higher education sector. Simola and Rinne (2011) argue that media visibility and the political use of global rankings have highlighted the topicality and relevance of comparative studies in education. However, this popularity has not entailed the development of theoretical and methodological instruments in the field of comparative education studies. There has been criticism among scholars of the solely quantitative comparative types of research (see Simola & Rinne 2011, 225) and the observation by António Novoa and Tali Yariv-Mashal still seems valid:

“The problem is that the term comparison is being mainly used as a flag of convenience, intended to attract international interest and money and to entail the need to assess national policies with reference to world scales and hierarchies. The result is a ‘soft comparison’ lacking any solid

theoretical or methodological grounds.” (Nóvoa & Yariv-Mashal, 2003, 425)

The problem of the comparative education studies is not restricted only to methodological and theoretical issues in the studies. Roger Dale (2009) demonstrates three fundamental problems in comparative education studies, which are methodological nationalism, methodological statism and methodological educationalism, meaning that the nation and the nation-state are still seen as the only and final policy unit, and the concept of education is taken for granted. In addition to nation-states, the webs of structural power operating throughout the world should be taken into account in the field of comparative education studies. Simola and Rinne (2011, 226) remind us is that education is still most often seen only as a question of increasing competencies and qualifications among nation-state citizens. This narrowness of the national view easily creates blind spots on how global and local interact in the field of comparative education.

Domestication of travelling reforms is tightly linked to larger phenomena of globalization and internationalization. Education, which used to be a relatively autonomous field, mainly intertwined with church and state, has become a platform for a ‘global education industry’ (Verger et. al. 2016; Steiner-Khamisi) and international organizations. In a section 2.1, I look at those practices and discussions in which internationalization is reflected in the higher education sector. During the last few decades, education as a field had become multifaceted and has been redefined as lifelong learning and has been connected to wider developments in public and social policy and governance. Education is still bordered by the limitations of nation-states histories, language and vernacular customs. At the same time, states and their economies have changed, crossing borders has become easier and less meaningful. Moreover, the overall discussion about changes in current higher education relies on the notion of increased internationalization. This turn in education has been studied from the perspective of globalization, internationalization and Europeanization (e.g. Lawn, Grek 2012). As a result of globalization in education policy, national and local policies are linked to globalized educational policy discourses, pressures from international organizations and global policy networks (Rizvi & Lingard 2010). Emphasising the complexity of separation the national from the global, Häkli (2013, 344) points out that under the state functions these concepts are interdependent and have historically constituted each other.

The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate the value of the approach of domestication in post-socialist education transformation studies. This chapter has three objectives. First, to look deeper into the studies of post-socialist education transformations in the field of comparative education. I have discussed the previous research in the field of comparative education in section 2.1. Comparing

national education systems from the perspective of the recontextualization of transnational ideas into national settings has been a widely studied subject among comparative education scholars. The aim of this section is to present the discussion on the field of comparative education, and how this complex process of recontextualization of transnational ideas into national setting has been studied. Moreover, this section presents a construction of theoretical understanding of change in comparative education studies in order to take the discussion further and to explain how the post-socialist transformations and domestication approach has been utilized in this study. Second, in 2.2 I have explained the analytical possibilities that the domestication approach provides for studying the role of local agency in (re-)packing and constructing local practices (Alasuutari & Qadir 2014; Piattoeva & Gurova 2018). Section 2.3 presents the theoretical framework, Bourdieu's 'discursive space of social reality' to provide a theoretical interpretation of the findings of domestication of travelling reforms in the context of higher education in Kyrgyzstan.

## **2.1 Comparing Post-socialist Education**

The study of socialism and post-socialism has contributed significantly to the formation and more recent (re)formation of comparative education. Iveta Silova (2010, 1) wrote that "comparative education has always had an uneasy relationship with (post)socialism. In the United States the relationship began during the Cold War, when the study of socialism occupied a central position in the field during the 1960s and 1970s." One of the objectives of the Soviet studies was to keep the United States a step ahead of the Soviet Union through education. One-third of all the articles published in *Comparative Education Review* in 1958 focused on comparing the Soviet Union education system with the education system of the United States (Silova 2009). This affected both the rapid development of studies on international and comparative education, and the development of new degree programs in the United States. However, the political tension on both sides of the Iron Curtain also contributed to the field of comparative education as the aim of the methods and purposes used in comparative education studies was to serve politically motivated goals.

Other words, in the field of comparative education has always been a tendency to learn more about the socialism and later post-socialism education systems. These dynamics from the early years of comparative education studies complicated the dynamics and relationship between post-socialism and comparative education. In the 1990s, the focus on studies on comparative education turned towards transition in education as Silova (2010, 2) pointed out "...as the Cold War ended and Sovietology became recast as 'transitology' during the early 1990s, the study of what became known as post-socialism held yet another promise for comparative education". The interests of scholars focused on

measuring the progress of transition from a socialist system towards the ‘western’ ideals of democracy.

By the 2000s, the framework of the transitology research had drawn closer to modernization theories. Scholars were interested in measuring the post-Soviet transition from Soviet education system towards the western system with its focus on human rights, democratic pluralism and principles of the market economy. Policy rhetoric in many post-Soviet countries moved from socialist education policies to more western-oriented policies. In their research, Silova and Steiner-Khamsi (2008) pointed out that at least in rhetoric, policymakers from the post-socialist countries of Central Europe to Central Asia focused on implementing ‘the education reform package’, a set of reforms symbolizing the adoption of western education values and principles, such as curriculum standardization, decentralization of education finance and governance, privatization and massification of higher education, and standardization of student assessment (see Silova 2010). Part of the explanation for the rapid adoption of western-oriented policies in Kyrgyzstan was indeed the government of President Akaev’s foreign policy strategy which was favorable to the West and was aimed at adopting the discourse promoted by international organizations wishing them to contribute to the emergence of democracy in this country (e.g. Pétric 2005).

In addition to this, policymakers in the region promoted the emerging rhetoric of ‘crisis’, ‘danger’ and ‘decline’ (Silova 2010 & 2009) when justifying the need for the western-oriented reforms. With the rhetoric of crisis, several western education models are justified. However, this does not mean that the education system itself functions properly. For example, in the article ‘The crisis of the post-Soviet teaching profession in the Caucasus and Central Asia’ Silova illustrates that the lowest-performing students are typically entering teacher education institutions, and this is one of the reasons why the teaching profession is in crisis. In this context, the western models are presented as being able to provide a solution to the local problems in the education system.

In the studies of comparative education, the change and transformation has been studied according to several epistemological assumptions. In this chapter I have examined approaches of world culture (Meyer et. al 1997) and policy borrowing and lending (Steiner-Khamsi 2004, 2012) to understand what those theoretical frameworks could offer for studies of post-socialist transformation. I have conceptualized western or neoliberal education reforms by utilizing the concept of travelling reforms. Finally, the limitations and opportunities for studying post-socialist transformation in comparative education have been discussed.

### **2.1.1 Comparative Education**

In this sub-section, I have provided an overview of the theoretical framings of comparative education. Various comparative education approaches have been used to explain the change in education policy from several epistemological perspectives (see Kauko & Wermke 2018). In this chapter, the world culture approach and the approach of policy borrowing and lending are presented to demonstrate the need for an alternative approach for studying education transformation in the post-socialist space.

Comparative education has come to play a crucial role in the field of education. Interest in other educational practices and policies began in the nineteenth century, as school systems were developing in the more industrialized parts of the world. Scholars were interested in finding differences in the achievements of students and the contributions of a nation's schools to societal cohesion and development. The aim behind the comparison was to learn from the others. (Nóvoa & Yariv-Mashal 2003.)

The next century emphasis of education was in building a modern welfare state. Policy actors were aware of the role of education as an important factor in developing economic growth, political stability and social development at the national level. Comparative educational studies act as indicators to measure the performance of educational achievements compared with other countries. The interests in comparative research was to learn from others rather than on comparing to others. During that time, even when performance was measured the results were only rarely public. After World War II the accumulation of educational and social data as well as the rapid advances in research concepts and methods enabled cross-national large-scale studies of educational achievements. (Nordin & Sundberg 2014).

It is undeniable among scholars that globalization has an impact on higher education. Alasuutari and Qadir (2014) described how paradigm policy making has changed from independent decision-making towards interdependent decision-making. Awareness of increasingly convergent approaches of education has become a center of education policy research, at the same time with increased understanding of the different local contexts. Most of the countries have been developing similar quality and evaluation systems based on similar criteria (such as the quality criteria of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, ENQA), the same international surveys are used worldwide by testing the skills and knowledge of students (such as PISA) and the same policy recommendations (EU, OECD) and international agreements (Bologna Process, Education for All Declaration etc.) spread all over Europe and beyond. Ozga, Segerholm and Simola (2011, 94) have noted how evaluation, quality criteria and different quality standards have created a governance system which has supported the birth of a new European governance culture. This new education governance culture is underpinned by several evaluations of learning results such as the

OECD's PISA studies, the growing importance of Eurostat educational statistics as well as by the ENQA higher education standards. Furthermore, the term 'outcome-based education' has been employed to understand this turn in education policy, in which the focus has twisted from ex ante educational planning to ex post evaluations (see Steiner-Khamsi, Silova and Johnson 2006). During recent decades, comparative education studies have developed a range of models and approaches to explain how similar educational developments and ideas surge and spread across the world (Steiner-Khamsi 2004).

However, not surprisingly, opinion about how this transnational flow happens varies among scholars. Also, the opinions as to whether globalization and the transnational flow of reforms should be celebrated, or concern are deeply divided. Depending on the epistemological understanding, change studies of comparative education have different theoretical assumptions (Kauko & Wermke 2018).

Together with the growth of comparative education studies, the rise of similar global policy fashion all over the world has become visible and a central topic of interest in comparative education policy. Also, the paradigm change in world politics towards neoliberal economic policy opened up a new rapidly growing field of research. The World Culture approach was developed by John W. Meyer and Francisco Ramirez with their colleagues at Stanford university in 1970s. This approach replaces the idea that the context for education is bound to individual societies with the theory that similarities in educational policy are the response to the needs of modern nation-states regardless of contextual differences. How the local reacts to such convergence that has taken the form of an 'international perspective' in education has been the latest research emphasis.

The world culture theory is interested in policy diffusion and in seeing how organizations are conforming with each other by way of coercion or mimesis. World culture theorists used parallel developments in China, Britain and the USA in the late 1970s as an example of the rise of neoliberalism as a global policy fashion attests to the fact that national decision-making is interdependent, and that the globe should be viewed as a single world society. Following the logic of conformity, world culture theorists seek to find characteristics of the contemporary world system that are affecting all nations simultaneously (Meyer et al. 1977, 255). One of the first hypotheses to explain the global convergence of educational systems have been the example of the global expansion of mass schooling. Its central theoretical claim was that educational expansion was not particularly responsive to the political, economic and social characteristics of individual nation-states. Instead, it was the result of the circumstances that happened in all of the countries at the same time. The world culture debate has become dichotomized and predictable over recent years.

Thus, the starting point for the world culture approach is the paradoxical relationship between national differences and global similarities. The world culture theory approaches the change from the perspective of competition, which



is used by nation-states to increase cooperation among international organizations (Kauko & Wermke 2018, 167). In comparative education, the paradigm changes from independent to interdependent decision-making have increased popularity of the world culture approach (Meyer et al. 1997). The world culture approach draws attention to the similar features of the education and schooling systems worldwide. From the perspective of the world culture approach, higher education institutions have a similar identity, they adopt the same practices and they operate in the same environment with other international university actors. World culture theories are built up from similarities between different nation-states, how nation-states are structurally similar in many unexpected dimensions and how they change in unexpectedly similar ways (e.g. Meyer et al. 1997, 145). In the world culture approach, emphasis is on the international actors and global phenomena over nations and local peculiarities.

Since scholars utilizing the world culture approach are interested in studying cooperation and competition to explain isomorphism in education, they can find global convergence behind national education policies. Meyer and Ramirez see policy convergence as an ideological and social convergence rather than borrowing between specific countries. The convergence is the by-product of modernization. They point to the world-wide educational expansion as an example of nation-states' 'natural course of development' in modernity in which it is not linked to any country or time, and it outruns changes at national level.

In the world culture approach, the local is not effaced and diversity is not compromised by the internationalization. The development is seen as a continuous process, which means that as a result of development, different nation-states move towards similar education systems, structures and practices. This assumption has been widely discussed and criticized by comparative education scholars. For example, some scholars have criticized world culture approaches for their lack of historical depth and dangerous generalizations of societies (e.g. Schriewer & Martinez 2004). They call for historical analysis or periodization that places the emphasis back to the local, where the diversity is.

Another approach widely used in the field of comparative education is the policy borrowing and lending approach, in which the core interest is in analyzing processes of borrowing and lending local adaptations of global reforms and phenomena behind the best practices, travelling reforms and international standards (Steiner-Khamsi 2012 & 2006; Waldow, 2012, 411). The world culture theories predicted that nearly all societies were moving toward the same point. Some scholars believed that after the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and elsewhere the convergence of educational practices and system would become more visible (see Offe 1991).

In the former Soviet Union countries, there has not been such a one-way flow towards internationalization in education (Steiner-Khamsi 2000, 89–91). Steiner-Khamsi tackles borrowing from the angle of policy research. For policy,

borrowing is propagated through a reference web that more properly describes the dissemination of educational ideas. She presents educational policy borrowing as a tactic often used for purposes quite removed from education. The point of whether there is a need for reform is moot. In most cases, educational policy is an instrument for making a statement about the country's pledge to progress, or for receiving aid in the case of the Third World.

The study of policy borrowing and lending constitutes one of the core research topics of comparative policy studies focusing on the political and economic reasons for policy borrowing and highlighting local meanings in imported reforms. Even though the focus of the policy borrowing and lending is in the phenomenon of globalized education practices and policy, the impact and the power of the local policy context is not underestimated in this policy approach. Schriewer and Martinez (2004, 34) argue that processes of global dissemination and standardization are simultaneously closely interrelated with recurring processes of culture-specific diversification. The interest in policy borrowing and lending is to understand the local context and its need for certain global education reforms (Steiner-Khamsi 2012, 469–470). The global and local contexts are perceived as being interdependent, and in many policy borrowing and lending studies (see Steiner-Khamsi 2012, 12) the local policy context operates in the first instance to understand the logic of policy transfer. Steiner-Khamsi presents how educational policy borrowing has been used as a policy tactic for purposes quite removed from education and the current needs of the country and might be carried out without self-evident need for that reform. With the policy borrowing it is possible to justify different local policy practices at the same time. Policy borrowing and lending starts from the standard top-down approach that identifies policies and then traces where they are diffused.

Steiner-Khamsi (2012) believes that we need more investigation into areas such as policy network analysis, sociology of knowledge, and comparative policy, in order to understand how education can be 'borrowed' or 'used' through policymaking. The approach of policy borrowing and lending was popular at the beginning of the 2000s for understanding post-socialist education transformation. It was also used in studies about Central Asia. In one of those studies, Steiner-Khamsi, Silova and Johnson (2006, 221) argued that Central Asian countries are second-hand borrowers in adapting outcome-based education. The highest peak of neo-liberalist education policy: outcome-based education ideologies and the quality assurance and evaluation movement, had been achieved before the movement reached the Central Asian countries after the resolution from the Soviet Union. In this study Steiner-Khamsi, Silova and Johnson (2006) emphasized the role of different actor and donors for promoting travelling reforms. In the low-income countries of Central-Asia, decision-making is dependent on donors. For example, Tajikistan's National strategic plan 2010–2020 presents problems that have influenced schoolwork, such as the need for new school buildings, heating

in classrooms, lack of schoolbooks and computers, as well as other issues related to school facilities. In many cases, which programs and problems are to be resolved depends on the availability of external funding.

When the local-global interplay related to the transfer of education policies is analyzed in low-income countries, the issue of external financial assistance is essential. In the development and dependency context, loans for a project signed off by international financial institutions such as the World Bank or regional development banks are accompanied by the borrowing of reform ideas (Jones 2004; Steiner-Khamisi 2004). In spite of the limited choice that is given to the governments of low-income countries that depend on loans or grants from international donors, policymakers and stakeholders are trying to translate their interests and the interests of peer group they belong, into the local interests.

How meaningful these programs and travelling reforms are depends in turn on whether the process of globalization is being voluntarily adapted or imposed from the outside. The policy borrowing and lending approach highlights the meaning of the political, historical and cultural context in global educational development. Local culture, local actors and local agencies have their own needs and interests that are negotiated in the domestic field (Silova 2002). Local agency is not perceived as a victim of global forces, rather global policy borrowing can be used by the local agency as a mechanism for reaching its own needs. The most prevalent justification for education policies is by constructing a national interest and national identity from which a solution or mix of solutions is considered for its own ambitions.

Silova (2002) pointed out that the borrowing of education reforms can take place at two levels – in educational practices or/and in education discourses. The fact that the borrowed education program was not implemented does not mean that the transfer process did not take place. Rather, the political discourse can be transferred as such, regardless of the education reform. Transfer of discourses does not lead automatically to replacing internal references with external ones, but mainly to providing the political context for the reforms which are to be realized in the local context. Educational reforms carried out do not necessarily lead to changes in the legislative functions of the state, but it can change the rules and norms in the communication structures of education. This means that changing discourse practices may lead to changes in knowledge, social relations and social identities (Popkewitz & Pereyra 1993). At the same time, they can modify the national field of higher education so that it more closely resembles the global field of higher education by borrowing the education discourse and concepts.

In policy borrowing and lending research, frequently used terms include 'references' or 'reception' to focus on the process in which nation-states borrow from global education models (Steiner-Khamisi 2004, 8). However, a transfer of global discourses may not necessarily involve a transfer of the education practices associated with it. Early studies in the post-Soviet context (see Silova 2002;

Morley 2003 and Pursiainen & Medvedev 2005) have indicated that borrowing western discourses is used as a symbol of internationalization and progress and at the same time as detaching from Russian and Soviet structural, institutional and ethno-demographic legacies. In other words, the central concepts of policy borrowing and lending are standardization and production of legitimacy (Waldow 2012; Kauko & Wermke 2018). The main emphasis in the policy borrowing and lending approach is the role of local actors and their ability to avail themselves of normativity such as ‘best practices’ or ‘travelling reforms’. The object of analyzing the change are adaptation of those reforms, ‘travelling reforms’, that surface in different parts of the world and link to local context.

### **2.1.2 Travelling Reforms**

In this sub-section I provide a conceptual framework of the concept of ‘travelling reforms’. In this study, the concept of travelling reforms is utilized to conceptualize the globally inspired reforms and practices that surface in different parts of the world. The purpose of this study is not to provide a comprehensive picture of the implementation of certain ‘travelling reforms’ rather to conceptualize the changing nature of higher education policy landscape in the post-socialist space. The concept of travelling reforms is widely utilized in studies about policy borrowing and lending (Steiner-Khamsi 2012; Waldow 2012). In policy borrowing and lending, the reason for applying the travelling reforms concept is to understand the why reforms travel from one corner of the world to another. The aim is not to estimate the implementation of certain reforms, but rather to explore how reforms are translated, reinterpreted and modified in local contexts. To what extent does this act of translation reflect an ‘educational logic’?

The methodological approach behind policy borrowing and lending is to understand the local policy context for ‘best practices’, effective policies and transferring reforms from somewhere else. Even though the emphasis is on the local context, global influences are central. This increases the importance of higher education to the nation-state when competition from the labor force, skills and knowledge is increasingly global (Green 1997). Education is no longer the domain of states, as an increasing number of national and international actors, organizations and the private sector have increased their influence on education policy (such as the OECD, the World Bank and the EU). This ideological change has affected the ‘socio-logic’ of education (Shriewer & Martinez 2004). Globalization has effects on higher education, particularly as regards transparency, mobility and the flow of information (Brown & Lauder 2009) but also through private interests, through the ‘global education industry’ (Verger, Lubienski & Steiner-Khamsi 2016). In the era of a global education industry, discourses of competition, quality, internationalization and effectiveness are seen as a part of higher education. Even though I have applied the concept of travelling

reforms, the focus of the study is not limited to certain reforms. I have taken the liberty to widen the concept of travelling reforms to demonstrate not only reforming practices but also discursive processes.

Indisputably, globalization of societies and economies has an influence on the higher education system. The international dimension takes an increasingly central role in higher education. Hans de Wit (2011) has described misconceptions in the internationalization in higher education, arguing that the internationalization in higher education is still activity-oriented and the approach toward internationalization is instrumental in many respects. For example, studying or doing an internship abroad is often regarded as the equivalent of internationalization. In particular, the European Commission's policy stimulates this mobility among Europe but also for Central Asian students. Mobility of students and staff distinguishes many motives and approaches. Living abroad to study or work is a main livelihood strategy for many people in the rural areas of Kyrgyzstan. Also, Schmidt and Sagynbekova (2008) have written:

“Central Asian's history has always been characterized by the movement of people, including external and internal, forced and voluntary, legal and illegal, permanent and temporary, ethnically or economically motivated migration”.

De Wit (2011) argues that mobility itself does not automatically respond to the level of internationalization of universities. The number of foreign students or English as the language of instruction does not always increase the internationalization of the higher education institutions. In higher education, the concept of internationalization is often understood as a set of processes and is often linked to the strategy with emphasis on ‘how to’ questions, rather than a reflective discourse examining political ends or purposes (e.g. Britez & Peters 2010), along with tendencies of internationalization individual reforms to become attractive for policymakers and higher education institutions (Lawn & Grek 2012). Those international influences include transnational agreements (such as the Bologna Process), institutional rankings (such as the Academic Ranking of World Universities, ARWU) evaluating rankings of various intergovernmental actors (such as the World Bank, the EU and the OECD) and the international higher education institutions (Lawn & Grek 2012, Amsler & Bolsmann 2012).

In the 1960s, European education ministers began to see the importance of education as an integral part of a common Europe. This idea was intensified over the years, and the goal of cooperation between culture and education became the idea of a common Europe. In 2000, the Treaty of Lisbon combined the objectives of lifelong learning, the principles of quality assessment, the concepts of a knowledge-based economy, and the state of education that later became a debate

on the establishment of a Joint Higher Education Institution (EHEA). (Nóvoa & Lawn 2002).

In 1999, the European Ministers of Education signed the Declaration of the Bologna Process aimed at facilitating student mobility among member states and creating a common European higher education area. The Bologna Process Agreement also laid down the criteria for the creation of European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), the introduction of a two-cycle degree system (a bachelor's degree / master degree) and guidelines for European cooperation in the quality control of education. The policies of the Bologna Process have been further clarified in the communique of Prague (2001), Berlin (2003), Bergen (2005), London (2007) and Leuven (2009). At present, the Bologna Process has been ratified by 48 states, including Russia (2003) and Kazakhstan (in 2010) (EHEA, 2008).

Simultaneously with internationalization, the concept of quality has become something that cannot be left to chance. Ozga et al. (2011, 2) argue that the concept of quality has been transformed with globalization. As in pre-industrial time, quality meant something fine, extraordinarily and elevated. The industrial mode of organization separated the individual worker from responsibility for the entire production process and opened up the possibility of mass production of poor-quality goods. Zajda (2003, 60–61) argues that in the Soviet Union, the stated purpose of education policy was the principle of equity. Equity meant equal opportunities for education regardless of social class, gender, race or place of birth as well as social justice. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the stated purpose of education policy has changed from the principle of equity to the principle of quality (Zajda 2003). The meanings given to the concept of quality are linked to competition, excellence, merit, selection and academic elite. In the 2000s, the concept of quality has become a defining feature of higher education policy in Russia (Bolotov & Efremova 2007). The concept of quality is often employed in the ongoing reforms in post-Soviet countries. In many discussions on higher education policy, the concept of quality is connected to future challenges of the education system and to the cooperation between society, labor markets, the state and higher education institutions (e.g. Bestuzhev-Lada 2001; Kovaleva 2003).

According to Beecham (2008), the resources of higher education have diminished globally at the same time as the focus of education policy has centered on quality. Profit responsibility has kick-started evaluations of higher education, which have gradually shifted to quality assurance. According to Beecham (2008, 117), terms accountability, excellence and quality have become synonymous with good in higher education policy documentation, while any of these terms do not undisputable equal or contribute towards good. Rinne and Simola (2005, 326) employed the concept of market speech, which has gained undisputable acceptance and replaced traditional academic values to the same phenomenon. The research literature on global education policy indicates that quality control

and quality assurance have become central interests of education policy globally (e.g. Saarinen 2007; Harvey 2004) as well as in post-socialist countries (Bolotov & Efremova 2007).

Within the exponential growth of awareness of the quality control and assurance systems, international large-scale assessments of student achievement (ILSAs) has become a topic of academic inquiry. In 2006 and 2009, Kyrgyzstan participated in first time international ILSE, the Program for International Student Assessment study (PISA) by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Kyrgyzstan was ranked last in mathematics, science and reading among countries that participated in the 2006 and 2009 rounds.

Steiner-Khamsi, Appleton and Vellani (2017) analyzed why different policy actors advocate for the ILSA. They find that the three most common narratives behind the discourses of ILSA were following the business logic of education. These narratives were following 1. public education is in crisis, 2. There is no correlation between public spending and outcomes, 3. school accountability, teacher performance and decentralization are key aspects to rise the quality of education. These narratives were also familiar in the debate on Kyrgyzstan. The OECD and the World Bank jointly conducted a policy review of Kyrgyzstan to understand better the poor performances in PISA studies in 2006 and 2009. This policy review concluded that despite of the expenditure on education (more than 20 per cent of total public expenditures), the outcomes are poor. Also, the public education needs systematic reforms. These reform areas included governance and management of early childhood education, teacher management, school curriculum and assessment, and higher education and research (Hou 2011).

Steiner-Khamsi, Appleton and Vellani (2017) argued, that in some countries, stakeholders engage in PISA for a range of reasons. Some stakeholders use PISA results to demonstrate the need for certain reforms. For instance, every participating government is assisted in finding explanations for their high, average or low performance.

The concept of travelling reforms was employed in this study to recognize dominant discourses and attempts that come to higher education outside the local post-socialist context of Kyrgyzstan. Ridge (2012, 295) writes how the problems of dominant discourses and knowledge production that privilege certain priorities and solutions over others becomes more apparent in those countries that are most different from each other. By employing the concept of travelling reforms my aim was to identify the discourses of internationally inspired higher education reforms.

### **2.1.3 Studying Post-socialist Education**

As stated earlier, globalization has influenced the transformation of education in post-socialist countries. Scholars in the field do not always agree how the effects of globalization should be interpreted. For example, in examining education

policy of different nation-states Ball (2004, 8) has stated that one can discuss greater or smaller similarities and differences in the stage of development or variation, but not of uniqueness. Nóvoa and Yariv-Mashal (2003) have argued that this isomorphism has coincided with a global turn of education policy debate towards creating indicators to examine and assess different education systems. Instead, scholars studying the post-socialist transformation have argued that globalization has influence on the education systems as well, but analysis of the transformation should not be limited to studying only arrangements of global policies in different national contexts.

Some scholars (Tamtik & Kirss 2016, 178) have argued that the internationalization of higher education has been used as a norm-building process that is facilitated through the active behavior of institutional agents. Global changes happen in localized places in which values and ideologies are promoted into society through the norm-building process. Applications of policy studies in higher education in Central Asia have been one of the dominant disciplines in the studies conducted in the area. Most of those studies have been interested in issues related to internationalization, travelling reforms and best practice. Even though scholars are interested in studying those reforms and the government of Kyrgyzstan is willing to implement those reforms, local actors are not paying close attention to those attempts. For instance, when Kyrgyzstan was implementing independent accreditation reform, there was a moment when the old accreditation system was not used anymore, but the new system had not yet been implemented. Merrill (2016) argues, that even when Kyrgyzstan has been without a formal system of evaluating its higher education institutions since 2014, there has not been public debate about it. Merrill (2006, 27) wrote that neither students, parents, the media nor politicians seem to care very much. She asks a rhetorical question about whether the influence of global governance is the driving force behind the education policy or are there specific circumstances in Kyrgyzstan education policy?

This raises a question about agency in post-socialist transformation. Why are those travelling reforms locally adopted even though there is not significant local interest? In world culture theory, scholars follow the understanding of rational choice theory, in which actors have 'objective interests' and a 'world culture script' to follow (Alasuutari 2015, 168). The role of actors with their views, motivations and aspirations has been ignored in world culture theory. Developments within discursive institutionalism have given more attention to these shortcomings of actor's roles in localization of globally travelling policies. The active role of local actors and agency in the diffusion of global ideas and policy models into the higher education system has been studied from several perspectives (e.g. Marginson & Rhoades 2002; Steiner-Khamisi 2004; Sahlin-Andersson 1996).



The theory of discursive institutionalism allows the interactions between institutions and the society to be studied. After all, according to discursive institutionalism there are always ideas and discourses, most of which tend to reinforce existing realities and only some of which promote change. In discursive institutionalism, ideas and discourse are taken seriously, even though their definitions of ideas and uses of discourse vary widely. Despite differences between scholars, the discursive institutionalism paradigm focuses specifically on the local process, the ‘meaning context’ and a ‘logic of communication’ (Schmidt 2008), through which global ideas are tamed to the local context.

The dynamics of discourse is central in discursive institutionalism, while the concept of discourse is more versatile and overarching than the concept of ideas. Focusing on discursive process helps researchers to show why some global travelling policies may succeed while others fail. There are always discourses which tend to reinforce existing realities and only some of which promote change. (Schmidt 2008, 311).

Like discursive institutionalism research, scholars in comparative education research tend to question the assumption “that individuals are incapable of strategic action and only imitate others” (Alasuutari 2015, 169) and emphasize cultural, social and political factors that motivates actors in the modern world to behave so uniformly.

When talking about the policy transfer and travelling reforms, it is important to note that local actors pursue, not just copy, a ready-made model but adapt it to local conditions and to their own interests. In that sense, actors are not only individuals but actors who represent different entities, groups and organizations. By utilizing the concept of a glonacal agency heuristic Marginson and Rhoades (2002, 281) emphasize “the simultaneous significance of global, national, and local dimensions and forces” in action of actors within organizations. As Marginson and Rhoades (2002) wrote:

“We do not see a linear flow from the global to the local: rather, we see simultaneity of flows. In the stories that we want to offer and facilitate about higher education we do not see global agencies and agency as fully defining national and local agencies and agency. National and local entities and collective efforts can undermine, challenge and define alternatives to global patterns; they can also shape the configuration of global flows. At every level – global, national, and local – elements and influences of other levels are present.” (2002, 289).

In Marginson and Rhoades’ (2002, 289) conceptualization the concept of agency is used to emphasize two meanings. First, the agency is an entity or organization that could exist at the global, national or local level. International organizations such as the World Bank and regional entities such as the European

Union are examples of the agencies at the global level. There are also governmental units, such as Ministries of Education and institutions, such as Agencies of Quality Assurance Evaluation at the national level. At the local level, individual institutions of higher education and their units are local entities. The second meaning refers to the ability of actors individually and collectively to take action and 'practice agency' at the global, national or local level.

In the post-socialist education studies the attempts have been more to learn about the region and their approaches to education rather than analyzing the interactions between institutions and the society. Those early studies in the post-socialist space followed western frameworks rather than emerging, locally grounded paradigms (Chankseliani 2018, 277). Consequences of that approach are that they do not provide information about what is happening at the local level. To enable analysis of the complexity of post-socialist transformation, the simultaneous significance of global, national and dimensions, we need new theoretical approaches in comparative education. For this purpose, I suggest the 'domestication' approach, which will be outlined in the next section.

## **2.2 Domesticating Travelling Reforms**

As written earlier, from the perspective of world culture theory, education systems across the globe have become increasingly converged. This perceived convergence of education systems has become one of the central topics of the world culture debate in comparative education (Carney, Rappleye & Silova 2012). On one hand, world cultural theorists seek to explain an apparent convergence through institutionalist lenses rationalizing the global convergence of educational and cultural worlds as a facet of modernity driven by the logic of technology, science and the myth of progress. On the other hand, the assumptions of the world culture theory have been challenged by those scholars who focus on the local adoption of global-level phenomena by highlighting the centrality of local action behind the national education policy implementations. Carney, Rappleye and Silova (2012, 367) argue that the logic of global and local in current understanding of world structures has divided the scholars into two groups: world culture theorists strive to find global similarities and their opponents focus on analyzing local features.

Moreover, the world culture theorists have been challenged by those scholars who focus on the local enactment of world-level phenomena by highlighting the centrality of agency and the politics of implementation of global reforms in local context (e.g. Alasuutari & Qadir 2014; Steiner-Khamsi 2004 & Silova 2009). For example, the approach of educational transfer and policy borrowing and lending (Steiner-Khamsi 2004) has been questioned as a global rise of rationalized world institutional and cultural order. Alasuutari and Qadir selected a slightly different approach while looking at the global isomorphism in the education policy. In their

studies, emphasis is on global isomorphism as an outcome of local decision-making (Alasuutari & Qadir 2013, 3). Alasuutari and Qadir (2014) have paid more attention to the nation-states and national ownership in policymaking, which is not only the process through which local actors are mindlessly coping with global success stories and best practice. The authors (Alasuutari & Qadir 2013) use the concept of domestication when developing a conceptual framework to enhance the understanding of the roles and willingness of the nation-states and actors at the local level implementing these global reforms and practices. Moreover, Alasuutari (2015, 162) wrote that

“discursive institutionalists scholarship focuses on research about the actual practices through which global ideas are incorporated in local context, as well as the discourses that motivate actors in the modern world to behave so uniformly in several ways, even though the culture of modernity specifically celebrates individualism and sovereignty and denounces mindless compliance.”

### **2.2.1 The Domestication Approach**

In education research, the methodological orientation of policy change is often divided into local or international notions. Either scholars approach the change reform according to national or international premises. Furthermore, the empirical studies carried out within the research tradition of world culture theory have shown that the globalized cultural context produces universalistic scripts from which states, organizations and individual actors derive many of their features. Scholars are increasingly convinced that national policymaking is interdependent of the trajectories of other countries. With the concept of domestication it is possible to widen the understanding of the policy processes. Alasuutari (2015) highlights the importance of the interdependency on the policymaking even though he is interested in what is happening at the local level.

The policymaking process is globally synchronized but developed nationally with local flavors:

“national states adopt global standards and policy models not because they coerced to do so but primarily because governments are convinced that it is good for them, and hence global governance works particularly through knowledge production and consultancy” (Alasuutari & Qadir 2014, 68.)

This means that local actors are actively promoting ideas of global governance, not only passively mimicking and unquestioning reactions to those global governance acts. To understand how global governance acts and influences local

actors' understanding, it is important to consider the actors' beliefs and values, which constitute the basis for the reception of global norms (Alasuutari & Qadir 2014, 68; see also Piattoeva & Gurova 2018). Alasuutari and Alasuutari (2012) argue that the concept of domestication does not question isomorphic development per se, but it challenges the dominant perception of how global trends and fashions are created. Moreover, the national competitiveness influences the decisions made by the policymakers:

“The nation-state is also commonly conceived of as a strategic actor engaged in competition with other states, as the wealth and wellbeing of the population is understood to depend on national competitiveness. Thus, policymakers do not promote global ideas or models simply because they want to mimic others, but rather because they are understood to lead to improved effectiveness and better economic performance.” (Alasuutari & Alasuutari 2012, 132–133)

This means that world culture theory provides a framework for research on global social change, domestication, but the interest is focused on the localization process. In other words, local actors not only copy the global model, but rather they are active players in the process of policy change.

Alasuutari (2015) has argued that the domestication paradigm shares the belief with discursive institutionalism that ‘social world and actors’ decision-making cannot be properly explained without taking into account the role of institutions in constituting the conditions under which actors makes their moves and how they expect others react” (Alasuutari 2015, 3; see also Piattoeva & Gurova 2018). With the theory of discursive institutionalism Vivian Schmidt (2008) highlights the role of ideas and discourse in institutional change following the ‘logic of communication’ in the local process through which global ideas are adopted. The interests of local actors to transform the original global policy initiatives into local problems are dynamic and subjective. As Schmidt writes: “[I]nterests are subjective ideas, which, though real, are neither objective nor material. Norms are dynamic, intersubjective constructs rather than static structures” (Schmidt 2008, 303).

Originally the concept of domestication came to the social sciences from anthropology, where it had been used to refer to the taming of animals. This idea of incorporating external, wild, objects into the community or domestic economy has been adopted in various other fields of research, likewise into the field of research focusing on the study of domestication in the context of households and day-to-day life (Syväterä 2016, 42). Furthermore, the framework of domestication has been utilized in examinations of foreign phenomena in several national contexts (e.g. foreign news for national audiences, Clausen 2004).

Recent studies of domestication of world culture models have emphasized the cyclical nature of global change (Alasuutari & Qadir 2014; Syväterä 2016). Even

though there is no obvious starting point or clear finish line in the process of domestication, it is possible to identify two phases that often appear in the process of domestication. In the first phase, the domestication begins with the introduction of the new global policy ideas. This can happen through comparison or introduction of the new policy reforms carried out in other countries. In the second phase, the domestication appears through the domestic field battle. Using the concept of ‘field’ underlines that the struggle takes place in a context wherein certain rules apply (see Alasuutari & Alasuutari 2012, 133). For Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, 96–97) field is relational entity ‘space of play’ and a ‘space of conflict and competition’, which consist of a set of objectives, historical relations between positions anchored certain forms of power (capital). As Syvänterä (2016) showed in his research on the domestication of the global model of national bioethics committees, even external pressure by authoritative international organizations is mediated and processed by local actors following certain rules in the field:

“In the context of national policymaking, the most important rule is that, although the participants in a struggle defend particular stakeholder interests and various convictions, they must all try to present justifications in a manner whereby their stance is framed such that it is seen as for the best for the nation and its citizens. Decision made in the field on national policymaking are justified in terms of the national interest, but at the same time politician and other stakeholders in the political field battles also defend several, quite different stakeholder interests” (Syvänterä 2016, 45).

Briefly, a Bourdieun field can be understood in basic terms as a relational space formed from the relationships between social positions and field-specific rules that define who can participate in the game on the field, what the rules are and how it is played (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992). A process of domestication may originate and take place in several fields. In a policy-making process, domestic politics take place on a political field where the actors try to convince others of their interpretation of facts. In the domestic field battles, actors justify their views and demands to be the best-proposed solution for the interest of the nation (Alasuutari & Qadir 2014, 11). In such a battle, actors take positions on whether they consider the policy idea or model debated to be beneficial or harmful from the perspective of the interests the actors are defending.

Besides using the international prestige or pressure of the transnational model, in the domestic field battle, policymakers and actors are more successful when they can depoliticize politics. The domestic field battle is the process through which policymakers argue the reasons why some reforms would be beneficial to the country. The process of how international reforms or models are adopted in the national policy is not straightforward. When the domestic field battle takes

place, actors who are involved in the process present a range of views, groups, political parties, professions, identities and roles. When interests clash, arguments related to the national cultural and political traditions becomes more valuable than international experience or facts.

To give an example from early childhood education policy, in their analysis of the localization of international trends in Finland, Alasuutari and Alasuutari (2012) argued that not only have global models been domesticated, but the rationales, counter arguments and forms of resistance which different stakeholders utilize to defend their interests are often transnational. This means that the ideals and objectives stated in the official policy documents must also be seen as a part of the political process and a global form of governance. Even though the role of OECD collaboration on early childhood education is undeniable, it would be misleading to say that local Finnish actors were blindly adopting a ready-made global model. Rather, the local policymakers were actively promoting early childhood education on the OECD agenda, asking the organization for a review of the domestic institution and then making selective use of the international reviews as justification for the reforms (Alasuutari & Alasuutari 2012, 135).

In that sense, the image of global models above the local has been questioned. Instead, these two scales, local and global, are intertwined in the domestic field battle. Häkli (2013) uses the concept of 'transnational field' as a tool for nuanced understanding of the intermingling of the national and the global. With that concept it is possible to study globalization outside of the world-scale processes and to seek how globalization is constituted 'inside' the nation-states. Intention of Häkli (2013) is to focus on interdependency of 'national' and 'global' and use the concept of 'transnational field' as a tool for understanding of the articulation between the state and global principles. The same idea is visible at the use of the concept of domestic field battle. For example, it is possible to see the presentation of the new laws from the perspective of the domestic field battle and is part of the domestication process. New laws and recommendations typically pass through several organizational levels on the way to the individual citizens and in every context, implications are negotiated. Also, some memberships affect actors more than others and can create dependencies, which influences the meanings given for undertaking certain reforms. Reform might appear differently from how it was planned in a first place, but at the same time, new ideas become familiar with the whole population through a domestic field battle and the integrated practices related to the policy in question.

It could be argued that from the perspective of world culture theory, the reform in question is an example of decoupling of global models from local context, causing a huge discrepancy between policy and practice or intentions and results. At the same time, it can be seen from the perspective domestication in which the ideals and objectives stated in the official policy documents related to the reform in question must be seen as "part of the political process and of the form of

governance that the reformed policy represents” (Alasuutari & Alasuutari 2012, 142). Despite globalization and ‘best practices’, domestic interests and national traditions may overrule the possibility for policy transfer or diffusion.

### **2.2.2 The Domestic Field Battle**

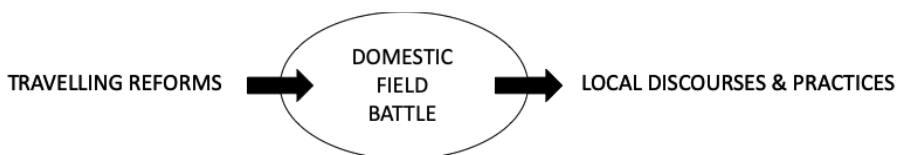
As presented earlier in the chapter, the domestication framework emphasizes the process of national policymaking when global models appeal to national context. The domestication of global policy models also constantly generates new global ideas and transform older ones (Syväterä & Qadir 2015). The domestic field battle described above means that the context in which the debate of policy reform is discussed has field-specific rules that define who can participate in the game in the field and how it is ‘played’ (see Bourdieu 1991). The concept of a ‘field’ is central to this study. Interaction is a key force for the field setting persisting. The interaction occurs in two ways: inside a field, when actors are interplaying with different habitus and their social positions; and between fields as these fields are hierarchical entities and most of fields are subordinate to a larger field of power and class relations. In this research, the higher education of Kyrgyzstan has been analyzed as an independent field which has his own rules, logic, discourses and operational model. A field of the higher education of Kyrgyzstan is not a permanent state and it was formed by history and various initiatives and actors. The domestic field battle was analyzed from the perspective of Bourdieu’s relational concept of society. The work of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu becomes increasingly associated with the sociology of culture, but he was also committed to the analysis of education throughout his career. His conceptualizations have mainly been used to study school education, but there have been empirical studies to employ his conceptual framework to address higher education analysis. These studies (Maton 2005) have shown the usefulness of Bourdieu’s conceptual framework for empirical analysis of policy debates in higher education.

The concept of the field is central to Bourdieu’s relational approach to society. In Bourdieu’s conceptualization, society is constructed from a range of fields where individuals are combating each other to manage and rule the field. The field consists of a set of objectives, historical relations between positions anchored by certain forms of power or capital (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, 16; Kosunen 2016). Essential in the concept of the field is to see actors as socially active players in the field. This active agency level can be achieved when an actor has all the features needed to succeed and influence within the field. (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1995, 136–137). To reach the field, certain requirements must be met and certain rules have to be followed. The field can be accessed only if actors accept the required rules in the field and is able to demonstrate the adoption of the rules. New entrants try to change the rules of the field so that their own position on the field

would improve, but the effort is to make the change so that the entire field does not collapse (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1995, 127). The field is a place of constantly changing forces and a struggle to change the field.

Maton argued (2005) that considering higher education through Bourdieu's central concepts of 'field' and 'autonomy' helps us to understand a period of rapid transition under the impact of marketization and new managerialism. With Bourdieu's theoretical tools internationalization of higher education in Kyrgyzstan has been discussed via the concept of 'social space of higher education in Kyrgyzstan'. There are multiple fields in a social space, such as the field of labor and the field of politics, which then have subcategories such as the fields of language, gender, corruption and culture (see Kosunen 2016, 72). These fields are relative-ly autonomous but simultaneously structurally homologous with other fields (Bourdieu 1993, 6).

In the domestication approach, the field battle is central. In this study I combine understanding the domestic field battle with Bourdieu's notion of the field. In the context of national policymaking, the concept of the field has a specific position. Introduction of the new policy model is typically debated in a national 'political field' (Bourdieu 1991). This means that actors involved in the debate or 'field battle' (Alasuutari & Qadir 2014) have a sense that they are entering the political game. The status of power relations between actors determines the structure of the field. People work in different fields, trying to strengthen the capital that is considered valuable in that field. When actors enter the political field, they typically present particular stakeholders or interest groups interests but in way that their stance is framed such that it is seen as being the best for the nation and its citizens (Syvänterä 2016). In the context of national policymaking, decisions made in the field are justified in terms of national interests. In the political field, actors take positions on whether they consider the policy idea debated to be beneficial or harmful to the interest group they are presenting.



**Figure 1.** The domestic field of travelling reforms (based on Alasuutari & Qadir 2014).

Syvänterä and Alasuutari (2014, 178) argue that when transnational models are enacted in national policymaking, the local power games and interest-based rationales of local actors should not be dismissed. They write:

“...we argue, an outcome of a political field battle in which domestic actors articulate a transnational idea or model with prevailing conceptions concerning the common good and the national interest. The participants’



success in a political field battle depends on their ability to present their stakeholder interests as the national interest.” (Syvänterä & Alasuutari 2014, 178).

This means that whether a global model or reform is enacted or not, “the entire political process, along with end results, is seen in a context of wider domestic political drama” (Syvänterä 2016, 45). As a consequence of the field battle, the global education model or policy ideas might be rejected or incorporated into the national education system in a form that is different from the original model or idea. Even if the domestication process does not lead to anything more than a rejection, new ideas and concepts influence the national debate and clarify the national education policy view and principles. The fields are influenced by other subfields and part of the larger national political field when political decision-making occurs. Alasuutari (2015, 177) wrote:

“Hence individuals who want to influence decision-making need to align with other actors’ views and sentiments, influence others with their own moves, or affect the beliefs about what the ‘general public’ thinks”.

## **2.3 Discursive Space of Domestication**

The theoretical approach applied in this dissertation is closely related to the studies of domestication, in which interests are focused on how domestic actors seek to justify decisions already made or about to be made in national politics through a domestic field battle. Methodologically, this study follows discursive approaches, meaning that discourses and ideas are the main focus of analysis. Earlier studies of domestication have demonstrated usefulness in applying the theory of discursive institutionalism when studying domestication (Piattoeva & Gurova 2018).

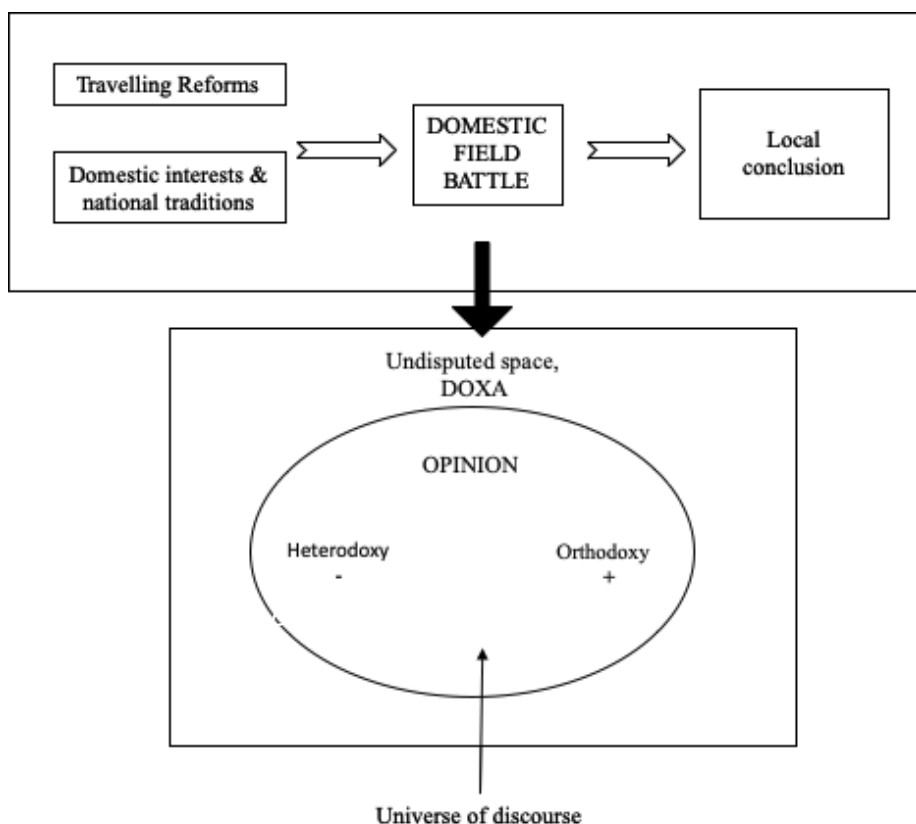
Yet, how these results of the analysis are interpreted differ from the earlier studies. To be able to respond, the aim of my research demonstrates the dichotomy between discourses on global travelling reforms and discourses and self-understanding of local contexts. I utilized Bourdieu’s framework of ‘discursive space of social reality’ for reading the findings of the study (see, 2002a, 164–170).

The discursive space of social reality becomes visible through ‘doxa’. In his book *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977), Pierre Bourdieu described the doxa as: “a quasi-perfect correspondence between the objective order and the subjective principles of organization [with which] the natural and social world appears as self-evident” (1977, 156). Discursive space of social reality focuses how the borders of doxa are defended by orthodoxa and challenged by heterodoxa. Questions of existence of doxa become visible in a situation in which it is interpreted critically (heterodoxy). Heterodoxy creates a critical discursive space

in which undisputed space, doxa, will be challenged and questioned with argumentation and discussion.

“Groups benefiting from the dominant situation are assumed to try to keep as many practices as possible inside the doxa unquestioned, and therefore form an orthodoxy to argue for these doxic practices. In other words, orthodoxy seeks to legitimate the prevailing doxa. (Bourdieu 2002a, 164–170)”

According to Bourdieu (2002b, 124; 2003), social discursive space is geographically ranked. Earlier empirical studies suggest that educational institutions located in diverse socio-economic areas may have different kinds of institutional habitus, and with the opportunity to challenge (heterodoxy) the current doxic situation or legitimate the prevailing doxa (see Hannus & Simola 2010). With the theoretical concept of discursive space and doxa it is possible to analyze the battle over societal power relations in the field of higher education. Bourdieu used the concept of discursive space in his ethnographical research carried out in the context of Algeria and later he developed the concept of field to illustrate the conceptualization of society, which is constructed from fields in which individuals combat each other to manage and rule of the field. In Figure 2), I have demonstrated how the discourse of domestication could be interpreted through the discursive space of social reality.



**Figure 2.** The discursive space of domestication of travelling reforms.

The full usefulness of Bourdieu's framework of discursive space social reality in the analysis of domestication is the way it allows the network of relations and discursive practices that support and (re)produce practices in the field of higher education of Kyrgyzstan to be highlighted. Discovering discourses which operate as the objective of truth, unquestionable orthodoxy and those discourses which challenges the dominant discourses (heterodoxa), provides a new understanding of the phenomenon of domestication.

Hannus et al. (2010) argued that in empirical analysis, Bourdieu's conception of the discursive space, Bourdieu focuses how the borders of doxa are defended by orthodoxa and challenged by heterodoxa (see, for example, Bourdieu 2002a, 164–170). Questions of existence of doxa become visible in the situation in which it is interpreted critically (heterodoxy). Heterodoxy creates critical discursive space in which undisputed space, doxa, will be challenged and questioned with argumentation and discussion. Groups benefiting from the dominant situation are assumed to try to keep as many practices as possible inside the doxa unquestioned, and therefore form an orthodoxy to argue for these doxic practices. In other words, orthodoxy seeks to legitimate the prevailing doxa (Bourdieu 2002, 164–170).

In this study, analyzing the discourses of domestication with discursive space of social reality, it is possible to unveil the doxa, undisputed space or shared understanding of the current field of higher education. Revealing the doxa makes it possible to provide a theoretical answer to a rhetorical question by Merrill (2016) – do the specific domestic circumstances influence higher education in Kyrgyzstan?

### 3 RESEARCH DESIGN

In the previous chapter I explained how this study of domestication of travelling reforms in Kyrgyzstan is theoretically linked to the previous studies of policy borrowing and lending, and studies on post-socialist transformation and knowledge production. How this study has evolved into this theoretical, empirical and methodological forms will be presented on this chapter. Instead of comparing national level policies to transnational development, the purpose of this study is to employ case-based analyses of a single illustrative example of domestication of travelling reforms in a post-socialist context. The emphasis will be on the actual ideas, beliefs and discourses that are deployed by actors when they are making decisions necessary for enactment of the travelling reforms or ideas. The selected case country is Kyrgyzstan for two reasons.

First, in the post-socialist context of Central Asia, Kyrgyzstan is a country that has been eagerly adopting travelling reforms and has been willing to cooperate with a range of international actors. Secondly, despite the desire to integrate into the international community, Kyrgyzstan's political elite have emphasized nation building and cultural aspects in current policies. This makes Kyrgyzstan an interesting case for studying the interplay between international and national aspects in education policy. By analyzing the higher education transformation of Kyrgyzstan through the theoretical approach of domestication, it enables me to shed light on the interaction of sovereign nation-states to global policy models. Under domestication theory, this process of adapting global ideas to local contexts is called the 'domestic field battle'. By placing the domestic field battle at the center of the analysis, it sheds light on the role of ideas and discourses of local actors in global policy transformations. The domestic field battle appears specifically at the level of discourses, debates and naming issues. As Bourdieu (2002, 170) concluded:

“The relationship between language and experience never appears more clearly than in crisis situations in which the everyday order (Alltäglichkeit) is challenged”

A crisis situation or conflict is closely linked to the domestic field battle, which is based on the idea that the change will only happen by questioning the beliefs, practices and political solutions. The methodological orientation in this study follows Bourdieu's notions of discourses and Fairclough's understanding of language. Language and discourses are part of the social reality, which becomes visible by unveiling the hidden logic behind it.

The aim of this chapter is to present a methodological framework for analyzing the domestication of travelling reforms in one country, Kyrgyzstan. This methodological framework is based on the theoretical understanding of discourses and language as a social process, which influences and creates the social reality of higher education of Kyrgyzstan. Furthermore, this methodological orientation has influenced the theoretical understanding of this study. As with qualitative researches at large, this study has changed its shapes during the years of exploring the case of higher education transformation in Kyrgyzstan. In Section 3.1 I present the aim of this study and research questions that led my research. Empirical research data and how the empirical data evolved into theoretical perspective is presented in Section 3.2. Finally, in Section 3.3 pre-sents how the method of discursive analysis is utilized to interpret the empirical research data.

### **3.1 The Aim of the Study**

The initial goal of this study is to reflect the complexity of the processes of policy transfer from one country to another. The theoretical roots of the study are related to the studies of comparative education, especially to the field of policy borrowing and lending. Earlier studies on policy borrowing and lending have explored that policymakers increasingly import ‘best practices’ and international standards and use them as a tool to accelerate reform in different national context (Steiner-Khamsi 2012 & 2006; Waldow, 2012, 411). However, the roles and argumentation of the policymakers importing those reforms have not been studied intensive-ly, even though the framework of the policy borrowing and lending provides the clues for understanding why borrowed reforms resonate in local contexts. Those studies concentrating on travelling reforms, ‘best practices’ and international standards examined how travelling reforms have been transferred from one country to another. In other words, the focus has been on the cross-national investigation of reform and on the ‘socio-logic’ (Schriewer and Martinez 2004) of cross-national policy attraction or acknowledges the political and economic rationale for policy borrowing. This focus explains why studies developed within the tradi-tion of policy borrowing and lending have not been successful enough to account for the actual processes in which global models are created and nation-states end up enacting them.

After all, the perspective of analysis follows the traditions of comparative education, and policy borrowing and lending, the methodological approach to the phenomena of localization comes from a different direction – from the perspective of ‘domestication’. At the beginning of the research on the field of comparative education, scholars tended to find political and economic reasons for policy borrowing and lending (see Steiner-Khamsi 2012). In recent years, more attention has been paid to policy transfer within and between both wealthy and impoverished world-systems. Scholars in the field of policy transfer, especially

those who have worked or lived in developing countries, hold a keen interest in understanding the political and economic dimension of imported reforms. The research paradigm in those studies focuses on the local context as the main site for understanding policy transfer (Jürgen Schiewer; Brian Holmes). It has been noted that the role of global actors such as the World Bank, the OECD and the regional development banks is highlighted in policy planning and Steiner-Khamsi (2014, 6) argues that: “local problems are sometimes created in line with packaged global solutions, rather than the other way around.” However, not much attention has been given to the local actors and process localization in different national contexts. In other words, despite the fact that studies of policy borrowing and lending use the local policy context as the primary site for analysis, the main focus has been to understand the borrowed reforms instead of the local context.

Silova (2018, 9) argues that the history of education can be interpreted as the struggle between two missions, “the mission that seeks to conserve society, its traditions, knowledge, institutions and structures, and one that seeks to transform it.” The struggle between these two missions has been highly pronounced during the post-socialist education transformations. Now more attention has been given to studying the notorious resistance to change in the comparative and international education literature on post-Soviet countries (see Chankseliani 2017; Silova 2018). This dissertation contributes to the growing scholarly effort to introduce ‘new categories’ in comparative and international education, challenging the assumption that the process of change in post-Soviet countries would be rather systematic, linear and uniform among different countries.

Moreover, as scholars have already argued, there has been a tendency in comparative education to study post-socialist education transformation from a perspective that focuses on analyzing how the neoliberal education reforms have been implemented in the local context (Silova & Chankseliani 2018; Chankseliani 2017). Even though there have been numerous studies on education policy in Central Asia, including a pioneering publication by Jeroen Huisman, Anna Somolentseva and Isak Froumin (2018) to discover the transformation of higher education system in 15 former USSR countries: ‘25 years of Transformations of High-er Education Systems in Post-Soviet Countries – Reform and Continuity’. There are also several studies on higher education reforms in Kyrgyzstan (Merrill 2016, 2012; DeYoung 2011; Ryskulova 2018; Shamatov 2010), but none of these studies have focused on the discursive construction of education policies.

The methodological orientation provides the underpinnings of the empirical study in this dissertation. The research data were based on interviews with a range of actors and stakeholders in the higher education sector of Kyrgyzstan. In addition to interviews, I utilized official policy documents from the government of Kyrgyzstan. Using the official education policy documents provided by the government and interviews with the actors from the field of higher education as research data and then analyzing them by discourse analysis allowed for its ‘taken-

for-grantedness' to be unpacked and it revealed the hidden logic that affects the localization of international higher education reforms (Alasuutari & Alasuutari 2012; McKennan 2004, 15). The methodological framework used in this study is based on the theoretical understanding of discourses and language as a social process which influences and creates a social reality of certain local context, in this case – Kyrgyz higher education.

Therefore, an alternative research strategy is needed for rendering the policy borrowing and lending process in a post-socialist context. For this study I have adopted a research strategy which aims to create a new understanding of policy borrowing and lending via a qualitative case study focusing on discursive construction of higher education policy. Instead of analyzing the policy reforms and programs that might explain the policy transfer, this study attempts to analyze the domestication of travelling reforms from the macro perspective. This study is based on educational sociological research traditions and discourse analysis through which I believe one can see and experience things built a certain way (see Berger & Luckmann 1979). Each social group and society have its own definition of what constitutes important and relevant texts, as well as its own highlighted and silenced discourses, that are dependent on time and place. In this dissertation, I identify and interpret the international agenda of higher education in a specific post-socialist context, Kyrgyzstan, and understand how domestication of travelling reforms appears through in discourses in the higher education sector in that country. In order to succeed in terms of the research aims, the methodological approach that I used complies with the principles of discourse analysis. It is also important to note here that qualitative research is expected to draw upon multiple (at least two) sources of evidence, that is, to seek convergence and corroboration.

Discourse analysis makes it possible to find social meanings, relationships and processes behind educational policy discourses. In discourse analysis, a text is part of a larger whole, which is reflected in the existing power relations, ideologies and practices. (Taylor 2004, 435–436.) By analyzing the highest and lowest levels of the administrative hierarchy, that is political guidance (policy quiding documents) and level of practice (higher education istitutions), with discourse analysis, it would be possible to uncover hidden logic that can influence a view of the travelling reforms (Alasuutari & Alasuutari 2012; McKennan 2004, 15). In other words, my research is based on a notion of the socially constructed nature of social reality, and on adhering to the premises of the dynamic relationship between higher education system and agency within social practices and discourses. The actual object of my study is discourses, by which I refer to simultaneous ways of constructing the meanings of something, in this case the meanings of transformation of higher education in a post-socialist context.



### 3.2 Empirical Data

This research is based on textual research data, presented in this chapter. The methodological orientation described above has provided underpinnings not only for empirical work utilized but also for the theoretical framework of the whole study. At the beginning of this study I wanted to reconstruct the national and international policy transfer in the context of Kyrgyzstan. When I started empirical research analysis, my first research question was to analyze how and why Kyrgyzstan conforms to global education policy trends. The second question was to analyze the roles and argumentation of the local actors for implementing travelling reforms for and around universities, and to compare them to the international agenda of higher education in Kyrgyzstan. During the empirical work, the third research question was formed. With the analysis process I witnessed distinctions between discourses of internationally inspired travelling reforms, and discourses and selfunderstanding of higher education institutions. Along with analyzing the empirical research data, the third research question evolved: to identify and interpret the discursive construction of domestication of travelling reforms in higher education in Kyrgyzstan. This guided my subsequent analyses.

Although qualitative research follows scientific principles, the nature of qualitative research is concerned with understanding that analyses take place as subjective experiences, in a social context, and at a certain historical time. This study has followed the traditions of qualitative research in which the theory is partly grounded in the data. This means that the theory utilized in this study has come from the empirical data, the ‘bottom-up’, rather than from the theoretical framework, from ‘top-down’. This has happened during the years this study took. Typically, in qualitative research, the theoretical lenses through which the researcher approaches the phenomenon, and the understandings that the researcher has about what might count as relevant or important data in answering the research question may change during the research process. It is important to recognize that qualitative data analysis processes are not entirely distinguishable from the actual data, because data collection and analysis processes were carried out concurrently. In practice it meant that at the first stage of the analysis the number of documents analyzed was different from those used in the final stage of the analysis. The actual research data were formed through the process of data analysis. This inductive nature of the data analysis has guided the collection of the documentary and interview data.

Also, during the process of empirical data collection and analysis, the limitations of policy borrowing and lending perspective became topical. The questions and discourses that are visible at the empirical data could not be answered entirely by using the policy borrowing and lending toolbox, which was the initial intention of this study. At that point of the research, the domestication framework became useful in order to achieve in-depth analyses of the discursive

construction of localization of travelling reforms in the complex context of post-socialist Kyrgyzstan. The strength of the domestication approach in analyzing the discrepancy between national and international discourses became visible when I started to work with the empirical data. In other words, how this study was designed and conducted evolved during the research process.

In the context of Kyrgyzstan as a post-socialist country in Central Asia, it is important to consider the framing of the empirical data. The empirical data have a significant impact on the questions that research can or cannot answer. In this study, the empirical data turned out to be more diverse, abundant and ambiguous than I was expecting from the earlier research and my earlier experience. To elaborate all of the nuances of the localization of travelling reforms, domestication turned to be the main focus of this research.

Also, the timing is important when collecting the research data. This empirical data was collected in 2015. The reason for collecting the data in summer 2015 was because it was the time that the new independent accreditation regulations were introduced. This timing caused me to enter into the research field just when one of the travelling reforms was being debated by the local actors. Findings from the empirical data showed that it was a moment for witnessing how global reforms were debated in local context, in other words, the moment of the ‘domestic field battle’.

The qualitative researcher is expected to draw from multiple sources of evidence and to seek convergence and corroboration through the use of more than one data source and method. The pursuit of the study is to utilize the domestication theory to illustrate that the borrowing of global education reforms can take place in educational discourses and practices. Because the initial aim was to study international and national policy transfer, the empirical data used in this study comprised two different research data. The first data were documentary data in the form of policy-guiding documents of the government of Kyrgyzstan including education legislation regulations, and guiding documents from the European Union. The second data source consisted of open-ended interview transcripts with actors from the field of higher education. The choice of research data and selection interviews involved several research solutions. These are explained in detail in the next subchapters. First, I present an overview of the official policy documents (Sub-section 3.2.1), secondly, I introduce the interview data (Sub-section 3.2.2), and thirdly, I focus on the local context related to the empirical research data.

### **3.2.1 Documentary Data**

With respect to the policy documents, I used several key guiding documents in the higher education sector in Kyrgyzstan, which are the Law on Education and Education Development Strategy of the Kyrgyz Republic for 2007–2010 (EDS 2010) and for 2010–2020 (EDS 2020). In addition to this, I have chosen two key

documents and program guidelines from the European Commission to illustrate the internationalization process in Kyrgyzstan. I have chosen five legislative regulations and two program guidelines, which are relevant for providing a comprehensive understanding of the priority areas of the cooperation agenda between the EU and the Central Asian states in the higher education sector. To understand the internationalization of higher education development in Kyrgyzstan I am using the key guiding documents that define cooperation between the EU education policy and Kyrgyzstan as research data. Consequently, the documentary data comprise three types of document, which are first, guiding legislation documents for higher education, second, a document concerning educational development in Kyrgyzstan and, thirdly documents about cooperation between the EU and Kyrgyzstan.

To make it possible to analyze travelling reforms, the guiding legislation documents for higher education are used as empirical data. To examine the travelling reforms implemented and the international influences at the national level, the key decrees of national legislation have been analyzed. As the definitions and frames of higher education reforms are defined in legislation, it is important to include the key legislation degrees into the analyses. The guiding legislation documents for higher education are as follows:

- I. The Law on Education of the Kyrgyz Republic (2003). No 92, April 30th 2003 (Zakon Kyrgyzskoi Respubliki “Ob Obrazovanii” 30.4.2003 No 92).
- II. The Decree of the government of Kyrgyzstan for independent accreditation, nro 670, September 29th 2015. (Ob utverzhdenii aktov po nezavisimoi akkreditatsii v sisteme obrazovaniya Kyrgyzskoi Respubliki 29.09.2015, No 670)
- III. Resolution No 496 of the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic “On establishing a two-level structure of higher professional education in the Kyrgyz Republic”, August 23rd 2011.
- IV. Regulations on higher education institutions of the Kyrgyz Republic, 3rd February 2004, Nro 53 (<http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/55077?cl=ru-ru>)
- V. Regulations on the National Accreditation Board under the authorized body in the field of education (<http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/96715>)

The second category of documents are the key development strategies for education. The first development strategy for Education in the Kyrgyz Republic (hereafter EDS) was approved in 2002. This strategy was named the Education Development Strategy of the Kyrgyz Republic for 2007–2010 (hereafter EDS 2010). The second strategy was named the Education Development Strategy of

the Kyrgyz Republic for 2012–2020 (hereafter EDS 2020). These both documents are used as a documentary data:

- I. EDS (2010). Education Development Strategy of the Kyrgyz Republic 2007–2010.
- II. EDS (2020). Education Development Strategy of the Kyrgyz Republic 2012–2020.

Based on the Law of Education, the Ministry of Education and Science is responsible for the Education Development Strategy, which is a guiding policy document describing the vision and goals of the country education development. The Ministry of Education and Science is the central governmental agency for education. According to the Law on Education (2003), the Ministry of Education and Science is responsible for developing state educational standards, for defining policy priorities in the context of the country's development strategy, for approving the rights and authorities of educational organizations, for coordination of curriculum development, teacher training, state examinations, accreditations, for appointing the heads of the Republic's preschools, schools and state universities, and donor involvement.

My intention in using EDS 2020 as research data was to understand the discursive movement of policy ideas and practices across national territorial boundaries. With this policy document it is possible to observe complexity of the global and local policy influences. In this policy document, donors<sup>2</sup> have used their voices to describe current education reforms, their concerns and plans to solve assigned tasks. Anyhow, those concerns are getting local meanings in that policy document. My interpretation is that EDS 2020 is not primarily serving as a strategic tool for national government to achieve its own national targets, but it is more as a strategic document to help the government to commit donors to the education development programs in Kyrgyzstan. Hence, it is a useful and relevant policy guiding document for studying international and national policy transfer. From EDS 2020 it is possible to find out crossnational policy trends in local policy discourses. Even though EDS 2020 has little to do with local policy practices, it is crucial to analyze and understand the discursive level between donors and the Ministry of Education of Kyrgyzstan. The purpose of using this document is to broaden our understanding of policy changes and to explore how global travelling reforms are molded to a national context.

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<sup>2</sup> Donors are considered to be an international organization involved in the field of education with economic support (such as the Open Society Organisation, Unicef & World Bank).

The third set of documents are declarations concerning the key cooperation programs between Kyrgyzstan and the EU Council, and program guidelines which set the framework for international cooperation, such as the Multiannual Indicative Programme Regional Central Asia 2014–2020. Within this data set, selections include the following documents:

- I. Committee paper: Opening of the EU-funded Erasmus+ Programme in Central Asia. 26.6. 2016. Council conclusions on the EU Strategy for the Central Asia Foreign Affairs Council. 22.6. 2015. European Commission (2012), From Erasmus Mundus to Erasmus+ Central Asia. May 2014. [http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/erasmus\\_mundus/tools/documents/repository/em\\_central\\_asia.pdf](http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/erasmus_mundus/tools/documents/repository/em_central_asia.pdf) Multiannual Indicative Programme Regional Central Asia 2014–2020
- II. Council conclusions on the EU Strategy for Central Asia Foreign Affairs Council (22 June 2015)

These documents are declarations of the key cooperation programs between Kyrgyzstan and the EU Council and program guidelines, which set out the framework for international cooperation, such as the Multiannual Indicative Programme Regional Central Asia 2014–2020. Through those documents it is possible to analyze cooperation in the field of education between the EU and Kyrgyzstan.

The restrictions with the selection of research data may be because the official documents and program declarations statements do not necessarily reflect decisions taken in the policy process of implementing international reforms as they are generally oriented to the future. Thus, those documents might create a unilateral picture of the situation of the higher education policies of Kyrgyzstan. To respond to my research questions and to be able to provide an accurate overall picture of domestication of travelling reforms in Kyrgyzstan, the context of higher education policy platform of Kyrgyzstan needs to be presented. Therefore, in Chapter 4, the comprehensive picture of the higher education policy of Kyrgyzstan is outlined. In that chapter, I refer to other documentary materials from Kyrgyzstan's higher education policy. There I used statistical data from the National Statistical Committee of Kyrgyzstan and budget databases from the Ministry of Finance of Kyrgyzstan. I consider bounding this research and background materials in this way to be a reasonable solution as it makes the examination relevant to the whole higher education sector in Kyrgyzstan, as well as to facilitate the contextualization of Kyrgyz higher education policy with other countries in the region. I also used materials (such as internet pages) from the universities in which the empirical interview data were collected. In addition to this, I also used publications drafted by the National Tempus Offices in five

Central Asian countries to contextualize the needs and objectives of internationalization in the region. I used the document of the Overview of the Higher Education Systems in the Tempus Partner Countries: Central Asia, to get historical and comparative knowledge about the systems of higher education in Central Asian countries, to be able to understand cultural and geographic circumstances behind the reforms and modernization. The documents that have been analyzed and used as empirical data are the documents mentioned above.

### **3.2.2 Interview Data**

The interview data comprised 19 interviews with policymakers, rectors and other university actors from nine national and private universities in Bishkek, Osh and Karakol in 2015. These interviews provide a perspective on the question how internationalization process was debated in the field of higher education. The intention from conducting interviews was to gain a reflective view of the changes in internationalization and to understand how internationalization is presented and justified by the representatives of the universities and policymakers. Diverse interview data challenge the picture of continuity of the internationalization process described in the official documents and program guidelines. In interviews I used semi-structured interview frame. Themes and questions used in the interviews are included in Annexes 1 and 2.

Out of 19 interviews of which three were group interviews with two to three participants. Five of the participants from universities were vice-rectors or rectors and nine others typically represented departments with international relationships and actively promoted international programs. When selecting institutions for this research I wanted to have representatives from both the private and public higher education sectors. The Tempus office in Bishkek were helping me to contact the universities and they helped me to arrange some of the interviews. To be able to achieve the objective of the study it was important to interview the representatives of the universities that were actively implementing global travelling reforms. The Tempus office helped me to find universities that were globally minded. Most of the universities in Kyrgyzstan are in the capital city, Bishkek (27 out of 52), six of the universities are in the second-largest city, Osh and the rest of the universities are in Jalal-Abd, Naryn or Issyk-Kul. Most of the universities in which I conducted interviews were in Bishkek, two were in Osh and one in Issyk-Kul. Before the interviews, we agreed that the interviewees would only be visible in my research data as a representative of their institute. Individual interviewees cannot be identified from the research data.

Before the empirical field work, I lived in Central Asia, I could speak Russian and understood the culture in the region. However, before starting the research, Kyrgyzstan was a country that I was not completely familiar with. This was both the weakness and the strength of the empirical research work in this study. First,

it transpired that my position as an external observer made the participants want to reveal something about their internal value system, culture and social structures. Instead of thinking that I as an interviewer sharing same values and understanding of the education system, they wanted to describe their understanding of their own education system. I conducted all interviews in English with the help of an interpreter. I had long grappled with the issues of conducting interviews in a foreign language, Russian. I was aware of possible confusion arising from conducting interviews with interpreters, and how this could affect my research data.

I conducted six interviews alone in English and 13 interviews with a translator who translated my questions from English to Russian. Interviews were scheduled in the interviewees' institutions, with one exception, which was conducted during a conference at another university. I looked for background for the interviews by reading through the history of the institutions and universities through their internet pages and by using a preliminary analysis of secondary data. I conducted interviews with single individuals, with one pair, and a group of three, resulting in 23 participants in the research. The interviews ranged from 25 to 100 minutes each.

Typically, I started interviews by introducing myself as a Finnish education researcher and I explained briefly my interest in Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia. I carry out literature review of Kyrgyz higher education sector before, which led me to base my research on data-driven research data. Instead of strict question patterns, the interviews were thematic and semi-structured. The questions (see Appendix. Frames for the interviews) concerned educational reforms and practices, the interviewee's involvement in higher education policy, areas of international cooperation for universities, educational traditions in modernization process and involvement of different global and local actors to national policy making. I asked interviewees to talk about situations, historical moments, actors and policy practices which supported the internationalization of higher education. Once a participant began to answer questions, I asked probing questions depending on issues and concepts that were important to them. In the 'probing' questions, I selected only those terms spoken by the participants as much as possible, to avoid forcing my own terms and meanings on them. Interviews began with warm-up questions, through which the respondents were free to make known their views on the development of higher education. After that, I asked more specific questions about the involvement of the various actors in the higher education sector and modernization process. In the third stage of interviews I asked questions related to recent reforms on quality assurance and their interrelations with the internationalization process, possible barriers behind education reforms, and national or cultural peculiarities that might influence the introduction of international reforms. At the end of the interview, I asked

questions related to the future of higher education and the respondent's views about the most promising scenario for the future of Kyrgyz higher education.

Research data are read by using discourse analysis, which is a contemporary approach to the study of language and discourse in social institutions. The discourse analysis affected the process of conducting interview data. I see the empirical data as the discourse part of a larger whole, which are reflected in the existing power relations, ideologies and practices. Traditionally the principal unit of discourse analysis is the text. "Discourse is not just ideas or "text" (what is said) but also the context (where, when, how, and why it was said). The term refers not only to structure (what is said, or where and how) but also to agency (who said what to whom)." (Schmidt 2008). In the domestic political field, actors present a range of views, groups, political parties, professions, identities and roles. In this study, my interpretation is that interviewees represent views that are relevant to their institutions, that interviewees are in a position to promote the convergence of higher education systems between the universities, national actors and international partners through interaction with education policies and processes. To be able to understand the context behind the discourses and ideas, I have divided the interview data into four categories:

- A. Organizations
- B. Universities
  - B.1. Public universities*
  - B.2. Private universities*
- C. National Team of Experts
- D. Ministry of Education

Those categories are not mutually exclusive, meaning that all of the participants in 'National Team of Experts', also belong somewhere in the 'Universities' category as well. Table 1 shows participant data according to quantitative measures.



Variables		Total interviews	Number of participants
	A. Organizations	3	5
	B. 1. Public universities	6	7
	B. 2. Private universities	5	5
	C. National Team of Experts	4	4
	D. Ministry of Education	1	2
<b>Total</b>		<b>19</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Distribution of participants</b>			
Gender	Number of female participants		14
	Number of male participants		9
Distribution of interviewees	Number of rectors/vice-rectors		5
	Number of university representatives		21
	Number of policymakers		2
	Number of actors from the National Team of Experts		4

**Table 1.** Description of the interview data.

In the group ‘organizations’ (A), belongs different educational organizations, which affect educational policy. For this research I interviewed three organizations, in which I has totally six participants. One of the organization interviews was a group interview with three participants. Group B, ‘Universities’ is divided into ‘public universities’ (B.1.) and ‘private universities’ (B.2.). ‘Public’ and ‘private’ are longstanding concepts from liberal political philosophy and political economy, making a famous and powerful distinction (Marginson 2007). The coding used in the interview data is presented in the Annex 3. As those concepts are unstable, ambiguous and unclear, it was not obvious about whether to use the public and private divide. In the Soviet Union, the higher education was first understood as ‘public’, and the ‘private’ aspects of higher education became increasingly important only after the collapse of the Soviet Union. At the same time, national and global dimensions, and new public and private aspects are impacting the system of higher education. This reminds us that the over-simplification of the public/private divide might be confusing (see Marginson 308–309, 2007), but in this study the division between these two types of higher education institution is understood in a simple way as presented in the public debate and sometimes in the scholarly literature (Table 2.)

<i>Type of institution</i>	<i>Function of the institution</i>
Public higher education institution	Government – State-owned – Non-market
Private higher education institution	Business – Civil society, family/home – Privately owned – Market

**Table 2.** Different type of higher education institutions (Marginson 2007, 309).

In this study, the concepts of ‘public’ and ‘private’ can cover divergent factors such as how the institution is organized and by whom, who controls it, how widely it is distributed, and who benefits from it.

I conducted five interviews with participants from private universities and six interviews with participants from public universities. I divided those universities into two groups related to their status. The public universities are financed from the state budget and they need to follow Ministry of Education regulations carefully and they offer traditional state degrees. Despite the strong reduction of the state budget, the number of universities has grown since independence. This is because number of private universities has increased. Both state and private universities depend heavily on tuition fees, as both types are struggling for funding and students.

New universities and educational institutions have appeared in response to societal changes. In the regional higher education market, private higher education institutions are not only operating for financial and commercial purposes. The collapse of state atheism, and the revival of religion, particularly Islam, has led to the emergence of new religious educational institutions throughout the region. Before becoming part of the Soviet Union, students in Central Asian were trained in the madrassas or religious schools, and after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the number of religious education institutions increased again. Other actors behind the private higher education sector includes international organizations such as UNICEF, the U.S. Agency for International Development, the Open Society Institute and the International Education Network (EDNET). Their initiatives include increasing internationalization in the field of higher education and establishing a program for the exchange of professors from neighboring countries. Those organizations are also involved in the operation of private universities. New types of private institution were including in the group of private institutions (B.2).

Group C, the ‘National Team of Experts’ is a special group of higher education reform specialists whose main task is to promote the Lisbon and Bologna agendas. Members belonging to this group also represent either private or public universities. For that reason, the categorization of ‘National Team of Experts’ is an additional description of some interviewees’ affiliations. The members of the National Team of Experts go through specialized training organized by the Ministry of Education and the Tempus office. The main tasks of the members of the National Team of Experts is to distribute the knowledge of these European

reforms among their institutions. The Ministry of Education approves the team with the authority of the Ministry of Education. With the support of the European Commission, Kyrgyz Minister of Education Kanat Sadykov signed a mandate in March 2011 to set up a national expert group to promote the Bologna and Lisbon process. After that, the first team was named in 2011.

In 2015 when the interviews were conducted, the reform of independent accreditation was debated intensively among actors from the field of higher education. To address the domestication of travelling reforms it is necessary to focus on agency at the local level. Different actors have different roles and argumentation behind their action. My interests were not only to focus on how policy relations and knowledge productions were constructed through written and spoken texts in higher education sector, but also to understand roles and argumentation of local actors to borrow global discourses about travelling reforms. The categorization with the framework of domestication helped me to analyze the role of different actors more dynamically. In this domestic field battle, actors present and justify their ideas, the logic of communication and their views of the best solutions for their interests (Alasuutari 2014). Different discourses between different actors, policymakers and university representatives are part of national policymaking as the domestication of travelling reforms.

### **3.3 The Data Analysis**

This chapter examines the data analysis, a textual and a discursive approach applied in this study. As discussed in the previous chapter, the research data for this higher education policy study relies on policy documents and interviews from Kyrgyz higher education. Even if the research data for this study consists of more than one type of data, my analysis focuses on the research data as a textual material in which I seek to analyze the content and structures related to the phenomenon of travelling reforms in higher education of Kyrgyzstan. While this work is set in the larger frame of discursive formation of higher education policy, the analysis is limited to debate about travelling reforms in one country context, Kyrgyzstan. The different meanings and justifications of travelling reforms need to be conceptualized to enable looking further into national and international higher education in the future.

Each social group and society have their own definition of important and relevant texts, as well as their own highlighted and silenced discourses that are dependent on time and place. Taking a social constructivist perspective (see Berger & Luckmann 1979) guides my understanding of policy texts and discourses. In a social constructivist view, language not only describes social processes and structures but also creates and supports them. The basic understanding in a social constructivist view is:

“...that reality is socially constructed, and that the sociology of knowledge must analyze the process in which this occurs. The key terms in these contentions are ‘reality’ and ‘knowledge’, terms that are not only current in everyday speech, but that have behind them a long history of philosophical inquiry” (Berger & Luckmann 1979, 13).

What is reality is dependent on what is constructed as reality in each society and social group. Methodologically, textual analysis of policy text and interviews does not tell us about the implementations of the policies in question as such, but it tells us which policy problems and goals are brought to the fore, and which are left aside.

The present study has concentrated on textual and discursive analysis of higher education policy. However, as Saarinen (2008, 726) points out, detailed linguistic analysis of policy text and discourses is not always necessary, or even relevant. This is because linguistic analysis rarely considers the wider structures, such as the text of the organization of the whole and social processes embedded in the discourses. Analysis might focus on examining small units of text and ignore situations where policymakers, administrators and academics engage with these discourses.

To succeed in my research aims, the methodological approach applied here is closely linked to the traditions of ‘discourse analysis’ and especially the tradition of critical discourse analysis, which I have described as a discursive approach. By analyzing language and text critically it is possible to make wider social observations. Discourse analysis is a combination of language and social analysis. (Taylor 2004, 435–436.) Discursive approach makes it possible to find social meanings, connections and processes behind the discourses of educational policy borrowing and lending in the doxa of Kyrgyz higher education. In the discursive approach, the language and discourses reflect existing ideologies, cultures and practices. When analyzing the discursive construction of policy process of higher education, it is important to note that although all actors in the field of higher education appeal to the best of the nation or another related community, policy consists of several interest and stakeholder groups. Within different research traditions (e.g. linguistic, sociological and political) the approach of discourse analysis varies. Thus, in the next sub-section (2.3.1) my approach to discourse analysis has been introduced.

When reading the policy documents and interview transcripts with a discursive approach, it is possible to make visible existing ideologies, cultures and practices that lead argumentation inside the higher education sector. My aim is to understand the power relationships that are built and maintained with discourses in education development strategy. Using a different type of empirical data gave me the opportunity to analyze the highest level of administrative hierarchy (guiding policy documents) and with interview transcripts to deepen the

understanding of how travelling reforms convergence with institutional understanding of higher education.

### **3.3.1 Discursive Approach of Domestication**

Discourse analysis has been taken up in a variety of disciplines. This section outlines how the discursive approach was applied in this study and the type of discourse analysis this study is linked to. This chapter reports on an investigation of the motives behind taking advantage of discursive analysis. As written earlier, epistemologically this study is linked to the tradition of social constructivism, which is a sociological theory of knowledge. Social constructivism focuses on the artifacts that are created through the social interactions and examines the construction of social reality and meanings through interaction. The ontological premises of this study rely on understanding that social interaction, social situations and social structures can only influence text and talk through people's interpretations of such social environments. Beginning with a brief introduction of the discursive approaches used in higher education studies generally, I have followed up by, explaining the options for deploying discursive analysis in studies about higher education policy. After that, I position this work in the field of higher education policy studies and explain decisions made in this study regarding data analysis.

Discourse studies can be divided into two approaches: the formalist approach and the functional approach (Saarinen 2007, 14–17). The formalist approach is interested in the structure of the language and the functionalist approach focuses on the use of language. The formalist approach sees discourse as an abstract structural system, in which discourses are studied as independent linguistic products (textual analysis) or mental processes (cognitive view). The functionalist approach, in turn, includes two approaches: the interactional and constructivist views of discourse. The interactional approach looks at discourse in interactional situations. Instead, the constructivist view looks outside the interactional situations and sees discourse as part of the wider societal context in which it is used. The division into functionalist and formalist approaches is not definitive as in discourse analysis, linguistic forms are part of the context (Fairclough 1995, 188). The division explains the focus, relationship between forms and function, and how language is interpreted.

The discursive approach used in this study is linked to the functional approach, as I see that the 'text' and 'discourses' that come from the empirical data are produced for a purpose and used in a wider social situation and context. The critical discourse analysis (CDA) approach has inspired the empirical work in this study, although the study does not always follow the principles of this tradition. Critical discourse analyses include a set of theories and methods for the examination of discourse and social life. It grew out of critical linguistics in the

1970s. Fairclough coined the term ‘critical discursive analysis’ in his book *Language and Power* (1979).

Since its inception, CDA has been practiced globally and developed into well-formed traditions including dialectical–relational, socio-cognitive, discourse historical, critical metaphor, Foucauldian, ethnographic, narrative-based, and interventionist (Rogers & et al. 2016, 1193). Depending on ontological premises of the research, several approaches of CDA have been applied. For example, the socio-cognitive approach in critical discourse studies (CDS) is more problem-oriented than discipline-oriented and requires a multidisciplinary approach. These pieces of research are based on the belief that discourse can only influence social interaction and social structures through knowledge, attitudes, ideologies and shared understanding of reality. Goals, data and theories used in research are chosen to study discursive (re)production of power abuse and resistance against such domination (van Dijk 2015).

The power abuse and questions related to the resistance to domination of power structures are also interesting from the viewpoint of this study, but those topics are not the main interest of this analysis. At this point, I limited myself to study of the discursive construction of domestication of travelling reforms at the general level, meaning that power relations and ideological dominance are not the focus of this study. I wanted to reconstruct the national and international policy interface instead of focusing on the national powerplay between different actors and institutions in the national field of higher education. I employed the understanding of critical discourse analysis in a way that the text is part of a larger whole, something that is reflected in the existing power relations, ideologies and practices.

The CDA aims to understand the power relations built and maintained with discourses (see Taylor 2004), which is also of interest in this study. By analyzing the highest and lowest levels of administrative hierarchy with discourse analysis it is possible to uncover hidden logic that can influence the spread of the international reforms (Alasuutari & Alasuutari 2012; McKennan 2004, 15). Merging systemic functional linguistics with critical social theory and historical analysis became the defining characteristic of CDA. Central concepts in CDA have included power, ideology and discourse.

The aim of the analysis is to uncover hidden logic that can influence a view of the world. McKennan (2004, 15) points out how critical discourse analysis will not only see the texts linguistically, but the nature of the approach is also sociological, based on the epistemological and ontological setups. According to Saarinen (2007, 31) the critical discourse analysis has theoretical, methodological, political and historical implications. First, the theoretical implications relate to the fact that text constitutes one important form of social action, at both macro and micro levels. Second, the text provides a major source of evidence for grounding claims about social relations, processes and structures. Third, the political

implication of critical discourse analysis relates specifically to social science with a critical objective. Fourth, the historical implication helps us to see social change and analyzing the text can provide evidence of ongoing processes. Text is a sensitive barometer of social processes, movements and diversity. Historical implications helped me to see the connection between discursive institutionalism and critical discursive analyses with the concept of change.

McKenna (2004, 12) suggests that language and reality have a reciprocal relationship with each other. Seeing and experiencing things is structured in a certain way. All communities and societies have their own definitions of the most important and relevant texts, as well as their own highlighted and silenced discourses. What texts are read in different contexts is dependent on both the community and society. The reality regulates language and the language regulates reality. Every discourse has its history. Without understanding and knowing the history, it is impossible to identify and interpret discourses (McKenna 2004, 15). Discourses are regularly formed in conformity with the importance of differentiating systems that are not static but are built and moving within the social practices. By differentiating, each element builds on our relationship with other parts of the system. One discourse might be undermining the role of the other discourse and may even suppress the different discourses as a wrong kind of truth.

Rather than copying for an extreme, idealistic view of critical discourse analysis, I turned towards the moderate approach of critical discourse analysis, which I simply described as a discursive approach. The principles of CDA emerge from the idea that language plays an integral part of constructing the world and discourses are seen as an instrument of power. In that understanding, the policy is seen as a language and it is possible to overlook some of the physical structures that frame the operational environment for higher education systems. Even though the textual analysis concentrates on text and discourse, policies also include actions which are not executed verbally. For example, funding allocated to universities is also a result of political action. Consequently, when employing the discursive approach for analyzing the data, I followed Saarinen's (2011, 22–23) understanding for studying higher education policies:

“The text may create a reality, but that reality needs to be reflected against the reality of political action such as funding, decisions, legislation, and operationalizations of policies.”

This means that policy discourses are not only rhetorical and textual interventions but also interventions into policy practices (Ball 1993, 12). In this discursive approach, policy discourse is a social phenomenon, which also has physical and structural limitations and opportunities that comes from the structures of higher education.

## 4 HIGHER EDUCATION OF KYRGYZSTAN

The history of higher education in Kyrgyzstan can be interpreted as the struggle between an international mission and national intentions. In the context of Central Asia, Kyrgyzstan has been comparatively openly involved in international cooperation in the field of education. Kyrgyzstan is one of the Central Asian countries that has eagerly adopted ‘travelling policies’, such as quality and evaluation reforms, policy recommendations and international agreements on education (like the Bologna Process). Kyrgyzstan has been a fruitful destination in which to examine the localization of international influences, and this factor has inspired many scholars. Those studies have demonstrated that reforms that are considered to be international are attractive to policymakers in post-Soviet republics of Central Asia, at least rhetorically (Steiner-Khamsi 2008, Silova 2011).

Education is an area in which the European Union and the Central Asian countries have voiced a strong common interest in creating common practices and programs. European education standards, such as the Bologna Process, have offered Kyrgyzstan the opportunity to participate in an international educational community and thereby strengthen its position in the field of global higher education. Above all, the relatively unproblematic nature of education compared with other possible areas of cooperation such as trade policy, energy or security policy, has offered the EU the opportunity to participate in Central Asia in a way that is acceptable to the autocratic governments of the countries in the region.

The systematic higher education system was established during the Soviet era. At the beginning of the 20th century, there were no universities in Kyrgyzstan and just under four percent of the adult population could read. (Sievers, 2003.) Although Soviet era higher education has been criticized for the elite, favoring the nomenclature (Melin 2006, 240–241), higher education gave young people in Kyrgyzstan more opportunities. (Reeves 2005, 10–11.) Some scholars have even argued that education was one of the sectors that benefited the country most during the Soviet years and local people shared this understanding (Reeves 2005).

Chenkseliani and Silova (2018, 9) wrote that the history of education can be divided in two opposite missions. The first mission tried to maintain the traditions, knowledge, beliefs, structures and institutions, and the other is tried to transform it. The struggle between these two dynamics was highly pronounced during the post-socialist transformation. However, most of the scholars had been interested to examine transformation, rather than investigating the resistance for change. Kyrgyzstan has been an interesting case study for examining borrowing and lending of travelling reforms in the post-Soviet space. Many reforms occurred with international cooperation and external recommendations. It is even possible



to argue that many reforms concerning education would not have taken place without an international presence. Thus, there has also been interest from outside the country to investigate the transformation process and adaptation of global education reforms. Several earlier studies of higher education of Kyrgyzstan had concentrated on studying the transformation and adaptation of certain reforms (Merrill, 2016; 2012; DeYoung 2011; Shamatov 2010 etc.).

Concurrently, the national education system and local practices have shown considerable path dependency. Despite the implemented reforms, practices seem to be unchangeable. Chankseliani (2017) has noted that there have been remarkably few studies focusing on the resistance to change. The influence of the capitalist market economy is visible in the field of education as the economic and political changes have had a significant impact on the transformation of post-socialist education. Chankseliani and Silova (2018, 10) argue that:

“The purposes of education have been (re)conceptualized with the arrival of the capitalist market economy and the departure from the exclusive focus on the needs of the communist state. While the economic and political purposes of education continue to be highly relevant, the social and moral purposes that used to be the core of the Soviet system of education have become less visible.”

The political and economic purposes are undeniably important for higher education transformation; the social, moral and ideological groundings of the education institutions should not be ignored.

This chapter investigates the higher education system in Kyrgyzstan. The chapter begins by presenting an overview of the country of Kyrgyzstan (4.1) and the formation of the higher education system (4.2). In 4.3 I introduce how the approach to domestication fits in to study Kyrgyzstan.

## **4.1 Studying Higher Education Transformation in Kyrgyzstan**

Broadly speaking, the aim of this study was to explore domestication in the field of higher education of Kyrgyzstan. For this reason, I have two interrelated topics to discover: higher education, and Kyrgyzstan. First, through this study I seek to understand the domestication of travelling reforms in the field of higher education. To examine the ongoing tension in the field of higher education, which has affected by Europeanisation, democratization and market-oriented globalization. Higher education research is by nature interdisciplinary and can be studied through theoretical and methodological perspectives. For instance, in this study I looked at the higher education from the perspective of comparative education

studies, meaning that higher education is not explored as a phenomenon, but rather the interest is in a phenomenon that affects higher education. Second, to capture complex transformation of higher education in Kyrgyzstan, we must have a strong background in understanding of the development of the country and its higher education system.

An overview of higher education policy research is presented in this chapter. The development of higher education research is closely related to the institutionalization of the field and to building academic self-awareness of the actors having varied disciplinary and institutional backgrounds. Inside academia higher education research has established its position as a field of study, but there has been also an increasing interest in higher education matters coming from outside academia. Higher education matters have direct links to the interests of the societies.

Saarinén (2007, 5) argues by using the division made by Teichler (2005) that the higher education research is by nature interdisciplinary and can be characterized in three ways. First, the interdisciplinary nature is visible as theme-based nature of the research, second, by its strategic nature as combining the needs of basic and applied research and third, as the unstable institutional status of researchers and research organizations. Higher education research, in turn, has been studied from the perspective of sociology (e.g. Pierre Bourdieu), social science (e.g. Simon Marginson), policy studies (e.g. Maurice Kogan), economics (e.g. Isak Froumin), pedagogies (e.g. Marita Mäkinen) and comparative education (e.g. John W. Meyer). In this study I approached higher education from the perspective of comparative studies, it is important to be aware of the principles in the field of study.

Significant changes have taken place in the field of higher education in Kyrgyzstan. Kyrgyzstan is a relatively open country in Central Asia. In contrast with other Central Asian countries, Kyrgyzstan decided to follow international recommendations from the early years of its independence. Political actors chose to follow principles of democratization, internationalization and openness in building a new state. Also, Kyrgyzstan became an interesting area of studies to understand the democratization, globalization and system change. Due to its unusual openness in comparison to the neighboring countries, Kyrgyzstan has been called as a 'Island of democracy'. This term was used to emphasize development that happened after independence. Within the context of Central Asian authoritarianism, the people in Kyrgyzstan had a greater degree of freedom than most people in countries around them. Interest in western education reforms was exceptional in the region. For example, in their comparative education study, Schriewer and Martinez (2004, 48) demonstrated that Russian interest towards western education models started in the 1960s and from the mid-1990s onwards, these models and programs became the subject of criticism. This study shows that

the 'national educational knowledge' of Soviet education system was in a strong position with respect to 'international educational knowledge'.

Kyrgyzstan is a country where western forms meet Central Asian traditions. Anderson (1999) argues that the nomadic traditions made the society of Kyrgyzstan pluralistic and the importance of the informal politics rooted in kinship and geographical connections cannot be underestimated when analyzing the recent developments. Geographical and cultural differences are reinforced by the variation of the lifestyles and geographical divisions. Kyrgyzstan's physical aspect is characterized by its mountain ranges and plentiful water supplies. These mountains which are the source of mythology for the region also create a political and cultural division, in particular contributing to tension between the north and south of the republic.

Outside the urban areas, families live in traditional courtyard-centered homes, while in larger towns, Bishkek, Osh and other cities, people live in modern housing and apartment blocks. These geographical, political and cultural divisions are reminders that Kyrgyzstan is a country of considerable ethnic and religious variation and where different nationalities constitute a state. In 1990, the southern regions witnessed bloody intercommunal violence, in which over 300 people died. These killings left a legacy of tension between the Kyrgyz and Uzbek communities of the Fergana Valley, which flares up from time to time. At the same time, the political elite of Kyrgyzstan has been highlighting the importance of international cooperation with international partners (e.g. the European Union, UNICEF, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the World Bank) and integration process towards western ideas.

#### **4.1.1 Transformation in the Field of Higher Education**

Kerr (1995) wrote that by 1520, 70 universities had been established in the western world, which are still in the same locations with some of the same buildings, and with governance carried on in much the same way. There may have been various interest and task behind the university over the years but the main idea of teaching, scholarship, and service in one combination or another continue to be the heart of the university. "Looked at from within, the universities have changed enormously in the emphases of their several functions and in their guiding spirits, but looked at from without and comparatively, they are among the least changed of institutions" (Kerr 1995, 115). However, despite a significant persistence, the university as an institution has faced changes during its history.

During the 17th century, the originally cosmopolitan universities gradually became centralized by the nation-states. With the rise of territorial nation-states, schools and universities became important centers for promoting and codifying national cultures, languages and geographies, and academics became an important

part of national elites (Ben-David 1977). Since then, higher education has produced ‘positional goods’ (Hirsch 1976) that provide access to social prestige and income-earning in the society and is one of the special features of the higher education. One of the more influential university models was the 19th century German university model, called the Humboldtian university model. The idea of the Humboldtian university model, to combine the research and education together, has been adopted worldwide (Ben-David 1977). In a broadly distributed version of the Humboldtian idea of the university, the notions of university autonomy and academic freedom are central. In the Humboldtian tradition, higher education institutions can serve as key institutions for the democratization of society. (Marginson 2018.) During the 20th century, the university moved from the margins of society to the center of it, changing the ethos of the elite institution of truth and knowledge into the institution that takes the social project of equality, democratic plurality and justice as its key mission (Nokkala 2007, 42–43).

Kerr (1995) declares that the new post-modern university, the Multiversity, has been born. As a result of the massification and enlargement of the higher education sector, the university has become fragmented. A post-modern university is led by various truths, values and practices and by different political missions. Moreover, the university has become an institute of cultural transformation and one of the most important institutions cultivating democratic values. Tirronen (2006, 130–133) uses the concept of the Multiversity when describing the transformation of the university into a service university wherein the idea is that the role of the university is to serve the nation and the state. The Multiversity is complex in its internal organization and it is heavy with administration. The task of the multiversity is to exert tension on the outside, with the result that the value basis of the university and the form of action are fragmented. Välimaa and Hoffman (2008) used the concept of the ‘knowledge society’ to describe the growing importance of knowledge, research and innovation in the change in post-modern societies.

The changes of societies from a modern, industrial society to the post-modern globalized knowledge society has contributed to a significant change in the university as an organization and social institution. Even in Central Asia countries, which cannot yet be directly called globalized knowledge societies, the policy rhetoric is changing the direction in which the principles of the higher education follow the principles of post-modern globalized knowledge society. The changes faced by higher education and higher education institutions during the last few decades have been described in numerous studies in the field of higher education (e.g. Gibbons et al 1994, Nowotny et al 2001, Delanty 2000). These studies have been interested in the issues related to the massification of higher education in the past few decades, the curriculum reforms which support lifelong learning skills and the specialized needs of society. Moreover, scholars have been interested in the diversification of university funding, increasing global completion,

cooperation of various knowledge providers and organizational changes in the university. Connected to the other reforms and changes, internationalization has developed over the last 20 years from a marginal point of interest to a pivotal factor of the higher education system.

Along with the rapid expansion of the higher education system, the growing interest by national governments and international organizations, like the World Bank and the OECD, are evolving higher education institutions, whose missions are increasingly transforming. In the 21st century, the autonomous university as an 'ivory tower' has been transformed into a quality measurement system, which is led by the political and ideological ideology to which the development of a society can be nationally planned and controlled (Neave 2002).

Ozga, Segerholm and Simola (2011, 94) note how evaluation, quality criteria and different quality standards have created a governance system which has supported the birth of new European governance culture. This new governance culture of education is underpinned by several evaluations of learning results such as the PISA studies of OECD, the growing importance of Eurostat educational statistics as well as by the ENQA higher education standards. Gushchin and Gureev (2011) argue that education is a top-priority interest of the state in Russia and in the Central Asian countries. The future of the societies and their economic and legal stability depend on the level of development of the system of education. One may argue that these changes have contributed towards an infrastructure of education based on statistics and measurability that serves as the basis for governance of education (Lawn & Segerholm 2011, 45). Morley (2003) has coined the term quality revolution to describe this turn in education policy that has been achieved by methods of bureaucracy and governance (see also Lawn, Rinne & Grek 2011, 17; Simola & Rinne 2004). Also, in the post-socialist context, the term 'quality revolution' has been used to demonstrate the rhetorical shift away from the Soviet era quality control towards a neoliberal quality assurance paradigm (e.g. Minina 2017). Other concepts to describe this turn in education policy include society of assurance, society of evaluation and evaluation society (Dahler-Larsen, 2011) which both highlights that evaluation and its features such as assessments and collection of data have become more common (Virtanen 2007, 12–13). What is common in all cases is that quality is understood to include the quality of educational outcomes, meaning that the quality of educational outcomes for students and societies is linked to the productivity of educational policy (Valverde 2014, 576).

The UN, World Bank and the International Development Evaluation Association have defined the approach as being an Evidence-based policy, which means that "evidence-based policy making refers to a policy process that helps planners make better-informed decisions by putting the best available evidence at the Centre of the policy process" (Segone 2008, 27). Segone (2008, 27) argues that many governments and organizations are using the term evidence-based

policy mainly because of “the fact that the policy making process is inherently political and, that the process through which evidence translates into policy options often fails to meet required quality standards.” In evidence-based policy making, monitoring and evaluation have strategic roles. The use of evidence can lead to differences in policy making (Segone 2008, 7), even though Karlsson and Conner (2008, 50–56) have pointed out the importance of keeping politics and evaluation operationally and conceptually apart.

First, the information function of evaluation should be the primary activity of the evaluators and under their control. Secondly, the judgement function based on the information, should be under the control of others, for example politicians, program planners and implementers. Furthermore, the term outcome-based education has been employed to understand this change in education policy, in which the focus has twisted from *ex ante* educational planning to *ex post* evaluations (see Steiner-Khamsi, Silova and Johnson 2006).

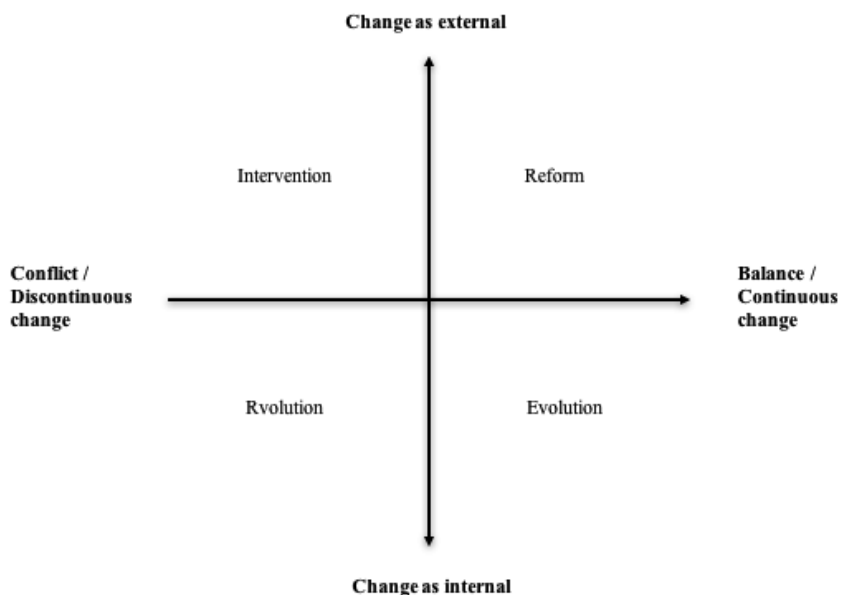
In the post-Soviet context, the role of the university has been historically closely related to the perceived tasks of the society. In the Soviet Union, the university was an important institution in the ideological dissemination of the state. In the current debate, there is discussion going on about how to develop the higher education system in the direction of becoming an institution that supports the goals of the state. In that discussion, the main focus is on how higher education supports more the economic development of the country (e.g. Senashenko 2006, 11 & Demidenko 2007, 89).

#### **4.1.2 Transformation and Change in Higher Education**

In comparative education, the idea of contingency and path-dependency are central. Kauko and Wermke (2018) argue that comparative education research should be approached from the understanding that the world and change are always contingent. Depending on the epistemological understanding of the change, we can approach higher education transformation from several perspectives.

In higher education research, the change is often in the focus of higher education policy research and assumed to be either a source for policy action or its consequence (Saarinen 2007, 42). The change is often self-evidently assumed as being a part of the higher education policy action. Saarinen and Välimaa (2006) depicted several perspectives of change in higher education policy research by using dimensions of external or internal, and dimensions of evolution or conflict. This model is presented in Figure 3, which consists of four fields defined by two axes. At the extremities of the vertical axis are change as external dimension and change as internal dimension. At the extremities of the horizontal axis are change as a conflict and change as a continuity. External change of higher education

policy change is characterized as borrowing, imitation, or diffusion. Opposite that is internal change, which is described by metaphors of growth or decay. Change as evolution refers to gradual development. In turn, change as a conflict refers to an abrupt change or discontinuation.



**Figure 3.** Higher education policy change (Saarinen & Välimaa 2006)

Epistemological understanding of the change influences research. For example, policy borrowing and lending studies have been interested in analyzing how global policy trends and ‘best-practice’ has been adopted in different local contexts. Indeed, policy borrowing and lending studies see the change as external impulses which are locally adopted, meaning that the change is dependent on external impulses. This approach gives the impression that the spreading of global education models is realized as a top-down diffusion into nation-states. From the perspective of the world culture approach, the change can be estimated by how the global models are landing in the local context. Whenever these models that land in the local context differ from the formal global models, the deviation is analyzed in terms of decoupling (Meyer et al. 1997, 154–156). In other words, the focus in those studies is to find global similarities between the different nation-states. In the world culture approach, the typical research strategy is to proceed from a recognizable pattern of adoptions of a given model among nation-states and then to test possible explanations for it and compare results among different nation-states.

The change can be understood as part of the process. Syväterä argues (2016) that the dynamics and processes through which the global models are

domesticated or transferred into the local context have not been at the center of the studies. As Syvänterä (2016, 52) continues, this is because interdependent policymaking is usually operationalized as diffusion of global policy models and accordingly, the typical research strategy is to proceed from a recognizable pattern of adoptions of a given model among nation-states and then test possible explanations for it. In studies of policy borrowing and lending, those policy actions that are studied are often described as travelling reforms. Those higher education policy actions could be also described and conceptualized as ‘change’.

This research has been driven by interest in studies of domestication. The unit of analysis deployed in the study is the domestication of higher education reforms in Kyrgyzstan and it allows me to analyze the entity of policy change in the country. In Saarinen’s and Välimaa’s (2006) approach, domestication is understood as an external change which is involved in local practices and discourses. Saarinen (2007, 43) argues, that:

“analyzing policy change is not only a question of analyzing causes and consequences of policy change, but the discursive processes that create the views on those policies.”

#### **4.1.3 Higher Education in Central Asia**

Merrill (2019) has questioned using the geographical division of ‘Central Asia’, a term that can homogenize the geopolitical diversity of the region, national wealth, conditions and natural resources. In the field of higher education geographical neighbors may not always share the same vision, even when they share the same past. Central Asia is home to ancient cultures, but the state structures are relatively new. This dichotomy has also manifested itself in the field of education. In the early 1990s, at the beginning of the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Central Asian countries faced similar challenges in building their national education systems. Countries in Central Asia needed their own education systems as the Soviet system, which had served as the vehicle to develop higher education, was running out of fuel due to the collapse of the Soviet Union, which in turn ended the central financing from Moscow to the universities of Central Asia. Along with financial demands, the Central Asian education system faced many challenges.

During the Soviet Union era, university degrees were issued by various federal government ministries, which resulted in the universities not being able to develop their own programs and consequently, universities had no experience in designing education programs and they were not ready for the open labor markets. Another challenge was the economic change. The financial system changed from a public finance system to a private financing model. Higher education resources declined as the budget collapsed in each Central Asian country.



From the perspective of geopolitics, Central Asia has shifted from the imperial periphery of the Soviet Union towards the global periphery. Silova (2011) has argued that while most of the Central/Southeastern European countries were enthusiastic to distance themselves from their socialist past and to move forward to European models, most of the Central Asian countries have kept their Soviet educational traditions. In contrast with other post-socialist countries in Central Asia, it is more common to refer to the old Soviet education system as a ‘good old’ system. Silova (2011, 11) writes that there is even a tendency to romanticize the Soviet past and avoid major education reforms. Today, these countries in Central Asia differ in their higher education policies on economic capacity and political agenda. Lagutina (2014) employed the term ‘functional region’ when looking at the geographical locations and affiliations between countries in Central Asia. The meaning here was that differences between countries in the region are bigger than their similarities. Even though the current higher education policies differ in countries in Central Asia, historically and culturally it is meaningful to compare these countries.

All five Central Asian countries, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan share the same Soviet past, but their post-independence trajectories in the role of the state in education policy has followed essentially different paths. In Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, the ability of the central government to exert its influence in many policy areas, including education, has been limited and donor-driven agendas have guided education reforms. In Kyrgyzstan there have been attempts to bring in educational reforms to fight against the gap between the quality of education in rural and urban areas, such as by implementing the merit-based National Scholarship Test (NST) to equalize entrance to higher education institutions. These reforms have shown that systematic change in the education sector is difficult if international organizations and other stakeholders are not coordinating with their activities (Shamatov 2012). Meanwhile, in Uzbekistan, the central government has taken a mixed approach with an increasingly authoritative command of the education content while at the same time supporting the establishments of branch offices of UK, Italian and Russian universities in the country. Kazakhstan is one of the five countries that make up the Central Asian region and it is the only one that is a formal member of the Bologna Accords. Kazakhstan is also the least donor dependent country in Central Asia due to its economic and financial stability (Tampayeva 2015). Nonetheless, both Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have made significant reforms to their higher education systems over the last decade that align them closely with the Bologna model. The other two countries in the region – Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan – still maintain Soviet-style systems.

During the Soviet era, education was free, valued and provided opportunities for students in border regions that they did not previously have. Higher education gave young people more opportunities (Reeves 2005, 10–11). The Soviet Union

strongly believed in education and science as well as in the social progress they made. During the Soviet era, systematic education systems were built into Central Asia, which resulted in a high level of Central Asian higher education in the 1980s. Many of the current political and intellectual elite of Kyrgyzstan educated themselves during the Soviet era, in Moscow or other large cities that were part of the Soviet Union. After the break-up of the Soviet Union, Kyrgyzstan moved from the principles and logic of the ‘international’ Soviet Union towards the ‘international’ west and marketization.

During the Soviet era, Central Asian countries had little contact with other countries and unlike in the Baltic States, they had no prior democratic history. Gleason (2004, 13) has written how these five Central Asian countries were closely intertwined by common links of history, culture and language:

“None of the republics ever existed as a separate state, none had a legacy of civil self-government, and none had even rudiments of the administrative apparatus of an independent state.”

After the break-up of the Soviet Union, it was unclear for the new governments what their intentions in developing their national educational systems would be, what the priorities would be, what the goals would be. Also, the economies of the Central Asian states were undergoing a series of crises due to the collapse of the command economy. The economic structures of the Central Asian countries underwent a great transformation during these years with agriculture and major industries experiencing severe difficulties in finding substitute demand from the Soviet command economy. This in turn had ramifications for the graduates required. As late as August 1991, the political leaders of these new independent countries, who were for the most part high-ranking communist party officials, it was still uncertain in what direction the country should be led. There were opportunities to follow the lead of Russian in reforms and continue to be linked to European Russia. Also, there were interests for Central Asian countries to be assimilated with Islamic republics and the large Muslim community to the south. In addition to this, the Turkic-speaking world was just around the corner. A couple of months later, the newly elected president of Kazakhstan, Nursultan Nazarbaev, announced five cardinal principals of government. These principles were: 1) clear division of power, 2) transformation of the Soviet era legislature into a functional parliament, 3) support for political pluralism, 4) establishment of the rule of law and 5) preservation of inter-ethnic harmony (Gleason 2004, 13–15). Right after that, other leaders of the Central Asian countries announced similar liberalizing agendas and by 1992 all the new governments stated their purpose to be secular, democratic governments with market-based economics.

Although the starting points and the initial challenges were similar across Central Asia, the development of the countries have been quite different. Looking

from the international perspective, Kazakhstan is the key player in the region. Kazakhstan is the major reformist country in the region with oil wealth and nuclear power. Kazakhstan's integration into the international community proceeded more softly and fully than did other countries in the region. Right after the U.S. established its embassy in Almaty in 1992, other major countries also opened their diplomatic representations, and Almaty became the most significant diplomatic center in the region. The international community had also been interested in Kyrgyzstan, which has been the most determined pro-reform country in the region.

Despite the small size of the country, Kyrgyzstan has been an interesting place for the donor community. Kyrgyzstan was the first post-Soviet country to follow the advice of the international donor community and withdraw from the ruble zone. It was the first country in the post-Soviet space to adopt western style civil code, a modern legal and regulatory framework, to liberalize prices, to privatize industry and to adopt an open political system. Kyrgyzstan was also the first country of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) to join the World Trade Organization. However, Kyrgyzstan's limited natural resources, industrialization and trade dependency constrained its progress. Reforms took place, but despite the promises, not all of the population has benefited from these changes. For the first five years of independence, Kyrgyzstan was given more per capita assistance dollars than other countries in Eurasia. Without any donor support Kyrgyzstan's domestic reform effort and the vision behind development has not proved to be sustainable.

During the Soviet time, Tajikistan was the poorest republic of the Soviet Union and heavily dependent on the support from Moscow and economic and social development is still less advanced than in neighboring countries. Tajikistan managed to develop a sophisticated education system, which was supported by budgetary transfers from Moscow. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Tajikistan suffered from civil war for five years (1992–1997), which led to a serious downturn in the national economy, society and the education sector. The long-running civil war left the country poorer, having destroyed much of the infrastructure built up in former Soviet times. For example, about one-fifth of Tajikistan's schools were destroyed during the civil war. With the signing of a peace accord in the late 1990s, rebuilding of the education system began.

The most heavily populated country in Central Asia, Uzbekistan, after independence quickly established itself as a nationalist country. Uzbekistan's first, and long-serving, President Islam Karimov resigned from the Soviet legacy and Russian political and cultural control. Karimov, the former communist officer, ruled the country under strict control until his death in 2016. Economics, government and culture were subsumed into a drive for Uzbek cultural renewal and to diminish the leverage of Russian influence. In 2005, following the bloody events in Andijan, the Uzbek government expelled the foreign press and clamped

down on local independent media. Following the death of President Karimov, new President Shavkat Mirziyoyev has made definitive efforts to re-engage with the region and the world.

However, the stringent nationalism of Uzbekistan during the Karimov Presidency pales in comparison with policy posture of its southern neighbor, Turkmenistan, which is known for its autocratic government and large gas reserves. After independence, Turkmenistan entered a period of isolation that has only recently begun to end. The area of current Turkmenistan was largely undeveloped during the Soviet period. Despite its gas wealth, much of Turkmenistan's population is still impoverished. Turkmenistan's rich gas reserves enable them to follow their own political path. As about two-thirds of the exports of Turkmenistan go to Russia, the government has sought out gas deals with several other countries, including China and neighboring Iran, to reduce its dependency on Russia.

Policy and the academic community in the twentieth century have been dominated by the view that liberal democracy and the market economy would be the best and most advanced form of governance for post-socialist countries. In the eyes of an international community, these countries are often described as fragile, unstable and a temporary aberration from transition. From that perspective, Heyneman (2004, 4–5) identified four main challenges in the field of education that Central Asian countries had to face: the structural changes, the financial turn, the educational transition and social cohesion. The first challenge was the structural changes in the field of education, from vertical governance to the horizontal governance. During the Soviet years, higher education was administered by several federal ministries, which prevented universities being allowed to develop their own programs. After the change in the system, the universities had no experience in designing their educational programs in response to changes in the economy and the labor market. The second challenge Heyneman identified was financial change. The financial system changed from the public funding system towards the private financing model. Educational resources declined as the economics, tax collection and public expenditures collapsed in each of the Central Asian countries. Simultaneously, every country has allowed the growth of a private education sector and collection of tuition fees.

The third challenge has been expanding educational activities to other actors, such as local regions and other local authorities. This has increased social cohesion, widened the social fabric and exacerbated social tensions. However, at the same time as the opportunities in the education sector has been widening, inequality has also increased. All Central Asian countries have also been inexperienced in balancing multi-ethnic objectives in education sector. The fourth challenge has been the entire transition process from the Soviet education system towards the western model.

Despite external expectations, these states have proved their viability and do not appear to be on the brink of a collapse. The sustainability of the Central Asian countries is explained by the degree of legitimacy these regimes have managed to achieve (Matveeva 2009, 1095–1096). Even though the whole concept of legitimacy is problematic in the authoritarian context of Central Asia. In the literature, legitimacy is understood as being a belief or opinion that existing institutions are morally proper. The American political sociologist Seymour Martin Lipset (1981) wrote that legitimacy involves the capacity of a political system to maintain the belief that existing political institutions are the most appropriate and proper ones for society.

In an authoritarian context, it is difficult to measure if the appropriate-ness of existing institutions is real. In Central Asian states, the level of authoritarianism varies between the countries. Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan belong to the followers of hard authoritarianism, while Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are following a softer version of authoritarianism. Anna Matveeva (2009) has analyzed the ways in which the rulers in Central Asia create and maintain their legitimacy, and the process by which the goal of legitimization is being pursued. In all Central Asian countries, it is difficult to measure the legitimacy of political order when freedom of speech is so restricted, hidden and manipulated. Matveeva argues that the legitimization of Central Asian authoritarianism has two facets: performative and symbolic sides, which interplay together. As the public is misled about the performance of the state authorities, the role of symbolic power is emphasized in this context. A performative approach focuses on the idea that citizens think that the ruling group delivers on the basic security and development strategy. By symbolic power, rulers are framing their performance acceptable or inevitable.

Legitimacy rests on several pillars which form the cornerstones of state ideologies, but the significance of these ingredients and their application varies across the region of Central Asia. Both fear and hope are key aspects of legitimacy. Matveeva (2009) writes that in Central Asia, hope is not often present, and it is replaced a lack of choices. Instead, fear is the crucial point that is emphasized in the projection of legitimization. The role of stability and security becomes visible by symbolic power in military parades, which are a significant part of the national festivals in Central Asian countries.

In the field of higher education, the change of political culture is complex and is affected by a variety of social, political, economic and historical factors. Although Kazakhstan is a member of the Bologna Process and part of the EHEA, and in that way are supposed to follow democratic social objectives, in reality the picture is more complex. In her study to examine links between student mobility and democratic transition of their home country Chankseliani (2018) demonstrated that more than 70 per cent of all mobility students choose to study in Russia. The cross-sectional data of the former Soviet countries proved that

countries that have higher number of students studied in Europe or America have achieved higher level of democratic development. Instead, the countries that have higher number of students studying in Russia are more authoritarian. That study also showed that 63 per cent of political leaders of Kyrgyzstan studied in Russia and only four per cent of political leaders studied in Europe or America.

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Central Asian countries have faced simultaneous demands for political and economic transitions away from their socialist past. Education has played a central role in the transformation towards Europeanization, democratization and market-oriented globalization. Concurrently, national education systems and practices have shown significant path dependency, with teachers using the same teaching methods and leaders leading the same way they used to during the Soviet years (Chankseliani & Silova 2018; Chankseliani 2018).

## **4.2 Development of Higher Education of Kyrgyzstan**

In the previous section I had an overview of the developments in education systems in different Central Asia countries. This chapter offers an introduction to the historical development of the higher education system in Kyrgyzstan. While demonstrating the complexity of education reforms in Kyrgyzstan I divided reforms into three time periods:

1. The first period of building up the education system during the years of Soviet Union (1936–1990)
2. The second period of intensifying education reforms after gaining independence from the Soviet Union (1991–2000)
3. The third period of improving quality, competitiveness and excellence by education reforms (2001–)

The first period started after the Russian revolution in 1936, when Kyrgyzstan became part of the USSR as the Kirghiz Soviet Socialist Republic. In the Soviet Union, science and technology served as an important part of the Soviet Union's national and identity building. It also had influence on the science development in Central Asian countries (Sievers 2003, 255). During the Soviet years, the first universities were established as well as the Academy of Science.

The second period of the education reforms started in 1991 when Kyrgyzstan declared independence from Moscow, and a democratic government was subsequently established and Askar Akayev was elected as the first president of Kyrgyzstan. The first few years after independence were full of hope and aspirations (Akiner, 1998). Askar Akaev, the first president of Kyrgyzstan, introduced reforms in all parts of the society, including privatization of state-

owned institutions and introduction a national currency (the som). Kyrgyzstan also gained membership of international organizations, shifted from a monistic power structure to a pluralistic electoral system and moved from a centralized state economy to a market-oriented economy (Abazov, 2004). All these rapid changes gained Kyrgyzstan a reputation as a leader of democracy in Central Asia and the term 'Island of Democracy' was popularly used to refer to the country (Megoran 2002; Meyer 2003). Opening universities for commercial activities was part of the first president Akaev's democratization process to modernize the education system and occupy young people in an unstable political situation after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Anyhow, education system faced countless issues and problem during the first years of independence. The first problem was a decline in expenditure. The state budgets were severely cut during the 'transition' period and schools and universities suffered from budget cuts because of moving from a planned economy to market economies. Teachers' wages, building infrastructure, learning materials and even heating of the school buildings suffered an average of about 50 percent budget cuts in Kyrgyzstan but also throughout the CIS countries (Öraz 2013, 33–35).

The third period was the intensive implementation of the Bologna Process reforms and integration into the European Higher Educational Area. During the first ten years of independence, Kyrgyzstan introduced changes in admission practices to universities, established an assessment agency on licensing attestation of educational institutions and introduced recognition of qualifications through the European Credit Transfer System. These reform processes are on-going. In the 2000s, more reforms, such as ratification and signature of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, setting the legal basis for a national quality assessment system and introduction of ECTS and European Diploma Supplement has been introduced. Previous studies have shown that most of these reforms have been more at the rhetorical than institutional level. The Ministry of Education has been eagerly adopting international reforms that donors have been introduced, but not paying enough attention to the cultural and institutional changes that are necessary for implementing educational reforms in institutional level (Soltys 2015).

In the sections that follow, I discuss the transformation of higher education in Kyrgyzstan and have a look at the earlier research on the field.

#### **4.2.1 The Soviet Legacy for Higher Education**

Until the conquest of Chinggis Khan in the early 13th century Central Asian made substantial contributions to mathematics, engineering and the natural sciences. For example, scientist Ibn Sina (Avicenna) was one of the most significant thinkers and writers of the Islamic Golden Age, and a scientist in medicine and physics in the 11th century, and al-Biruni was a scientist in physics, who is often recognized

as the greatest Islamic scientist. After the 13th century, Central Asian contributions to science began to dissipate as the region entered a period of decline. By the time of the Russian conquest, Central Asia was a technologically backward area of the Islamic world. Before the Soviet Union the state interest in education, science and technology was low. Soviet human development policy gained momentum in Central Asia and these policies affected Central Asia deeply (Sievers 2003, 253–254).

The key task of the Soviet Union education policy was creating the 'socialist person'. There were two aspects of education in the Soviet Union: *uchebnaya rabota* (curriculum subject-based program) and *vospitaniye* ('social upbringing' program). The social upbringing program with universal schooling as a right and duty of citizenship was a revolutionary concept in the Central Asian region. Local cultures emphasised formal and informal social networks, preservation of tribal interest and patriarchal culture confronted Soviet social upbringing with emphasis on gender equality, occupational specialization and advancement through Communist Party membership. *Uchebnaya rabota* was based of the Soviet educational philosophy, which believed that nature and society could be scientifically understood and presented via teachers as a 'facts' armed with the theory of Marxism-Leninism. Mathematics and physical sciences were more valued than in western countries (DeYoung 2006, 499–500). All former Soviet Republics had high levels of education and literacy, equal gender enrolment at all levels of education, the system achieved high levels of mathematics and scientific knowledge as well as having schooling and staffing levels that were in excess of market-based economics at comparable per capita income levels (Shagdar 2006). Education in the Soviet Union was free. With massive campaigns for basic education, the literacy rate in what is now Kyrgyzstan jumped from 16.5 per cent in 1926 to 99.8 per cent in 1979 (Shamatov 2012, 73).

Although Kyrgyzstan benefited from the education system, it also meant compromising local values, languages and culture. Soviet education was based on the ideology of the Communist party and creating communist people. This meant the curriculum was given from Moscow, with no opportunities for local adaptation. Social sciences and humanities were not part of the curriculum. Also, the education system was inflexible and making any changes to the system was impossible (Shagdar 2006, 515). Students studied the same curriculum despite where they came from. While Soviet education overtly promoted internationalism above nationalist and ethnic identities, and in practice it promoted Russian identity over national identities within the Soviet Union. Shamatov (2012, 73–74) pointed out how students were largely exposed to the same centrally designed curriculum, with only minor local adaptations. Success in the Soviet Union was closely related to speaking and acting culturally Russian at the cost of the Kyrgyz language, identity and culture.



One common characteristic of Soviet education systems was how education in the party and states was expected to provide ideological cohesion. Teachers in Soviet schools were using pedagogical techniques that helped to build unity inside the classroom, at the school level, in the community, in the party and in the whole Soviet Union. At the beginning, behavior was regulated through the peer group, which leads to synthesis at the next level. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, western scholars started to highlight the differences between western and Soviet education models. For example, Heyneman (1998) emphasized demands of political and economic transformations, and ideological move away from the socialist past toward a western future. The Soviet education model was based on the role of the party and Soviet state. In a centrally administered Soviet economy there were a little need for individual decision-making. He argued that this should be compared with western economies, which were based on individual decision-making. Heyneman (1998, 23) estimated that education could be the driving force for making the change towards western ideals.

At the same time, actors in the field of higher education in Central Asia saw this need for change from a slightly different perspective. Central Asia benefited from the Soviet science policy and now, three decades after the dissolution of Soviet Union, we can see that the national education systems and practices have shown considerable path dependence. The level of higher education and science was high during the Soviet years. In the Soviet Union, science and technology served as an important part of national politics, practices, and identity. Sievers (2003, 255) has argued, that science was a tangible, important and influential phenomenon during the Soviet period and the development and distribution of science was supported from Moscow. In the 1920s and 1930s, the Soviet Union implemented a process of forced settlement and collectivization in the Kyrgyz SSR. Early Bolshevik programs of ‘civilizing’ the Central Asia included implementation of the higher education institutions and establishing branch offices of the Russian Academy of Science. These institutions existed side by side with traditional educational institutions such as maktab and madrasa until 1930 (Khalid 1999).

The first university in the Kyrgyz SSR was established in 1925. Student numbers were set by the State Planning Committee (Gosplan), which determined the demand for particular specializations in the national economy. All levels of education were state-funded and public. By the time of independence in 1991, the country had 12 institutions of higher education, each of which served a different function within the educational system.

In 1921, the first National Geological Survey of Talas and the western part of the Kyrgyz Chain were implemented. In 1931, the Academy of Science’s most approved strategy was to create affiliates throughout the country, with emphasis on five Siberian cities, four Central Asian capitals and Tiflis (now Tbilisi). As a result of this, in 1954 the Academy of Sciences of the Kyrgyz SSR was

established. Elements of the Academy of Sciences of the Kyrgyz SSR are visible in the present in current Academy of Science. In 1993, the Academy of Science of the Kyrgyz Republic was transformed into the National Academy of Sciences of the Kyrgyz Republic (NAS KR) and gained the status of the supreme public scientific institution by government decree. Sievers (2003, 273) argued that the scientific level was significantly high when the Soviet Union broke up.

In 1991 many areas of Central Asia were capable making investments that would have created high-technology islands of expertise in molecular biology, computer science and heavy industry. Two decades later, Central Asia had witnessed the loss of the best personnel, scientifically insufficient technological capacity (much of the equipment sold abroad) and inadequate pathways for young scholars, so such development is now impossible. International scientific activities of the National Academy of Sciences of the Kyrgyz Republic are an essential part of its development. The Academy is funded from a separate line in the republic's budget and includes basic program financing for basic and applied studies, as well as financial provision of academic science infrastructure. By the beginning of 2000, the Academy of Science had signed more than 90 Agreements on Cooperation with scientific institutions in foreign countries, including cooperation with the Chinese, Russians and Kazakhs. Priority Scientific Areas of the Academy of Science are water and energy resources, new technology and materials, information technology and management problems, complex study and subsoil development of mountain territories, reproduction of bio resources, biotechnology and human being and society (The Decree of the NAS KR Presidium № 37, 2009). It is undeniable, however, that the level of the Academy of Sciences is no longer equivalent to that it used to be during the Soviet years.

#### **4.2.2 Modernization of Higher Education**

As stated earlier, the current higher education system of Kyrgyzstan is a result of a development process that started during the Soviet Union period. The basis of the higher education system was built up during the time when society operated under quite different principles. Some principles have more or less remained the same – for example, the role of higher education in the development of society is considered to be important.

Universities serve several functions in every society beyond just transmitting academic knowledge and skills. Functions can be differentiated between manifest and latent functions (Merton 1968). A manifest function of universities is a function that people believe is the obvious purpose of a university and education. For example, students are expected to learn new information, to become a representative of a given profession (e.g. a lawyer or a doctor) and learn social rules and expectations from interactions with others in a certain profession. Two

of the more significant manifest functions of universities beyond teaching subject knowledge are socialization and the transmission of cultural norms and values. Besides socialization, another significant manifest function of education is the transmission of cultural norms and values to new generations, which is known as culturization. Education helps to mold a diverse population into one society with a shared national identity and prepare future generations for their citizenship roles.

Also, internationalization has become a purpose behind higher education. Transformation towards international standards is one of the manifest functions of education, which has not only exerted influence in the education field but is also related to the national success in the international market economy. In addition to manifest functions, universities also serve the latent functions of society. A latent function is a function which is not publicly expressed and not declared in a curriculum. Latent functions could be unintentional and unrecognized outcomes of education. While manifest functions are intended or recognized and may have a positive effect on society, latent functions are unintended or unrecognized and might have a negative effect on society.

In the Soviet Union, the role of education was important in spreading an ideology. Research and education were dominated by Marxist-Leninist ideology. Students were taught about laws and a political way of life through civic lessons, and they were taught patriotism through rituals. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the function of education also changed. International organizations through their education initiatives use a wide set of governance instruments to influence national education policymaking. However, the capacity of the country and willingness to respond to international influences also depends on its national functions of education.

In academic writing in the late 1980s and the 1990s, it came to be assumed that the economic reforms under Gorbachev were taking the Soviet Union along a path of transition to western-style liberal capitalism (Kivinen & Cox 2016). Even before that, the economic modernization project started in the Soviet Union. The Soviet space program was globally the most modern technological achievement of the late 1950s and early 1960s. In addition to the space program, there were other related scientific and technological breakthroughs in the Soviet Union, including the high level of mathematic sciences and improvement in the computer technology in the 1950s (Autio-Sarasma 2016, 83). Kivinen and Cox (2016) argued that the Russian leaders viewed modernization as an essential element of the strategies by which Russia might catch up with the West and become and remain a great power. Moreover, what is happening in Russia is closely followed in Central Asian countries. The question for Central Asian countries has been whether they should choose a modernization model that partly borrows the western model and would include democratic reform of political systems, or whether those countries should rely on stateled modernization and follow the Russian model.

Anyhow, a number of scholars have contended that the modernization partnership with the EU and Russia did not achieve what it was meant to achieve (Burkhardt 2013; David & Romanova 2015; Larionova 2015; Makarychev & Meister 2015). For example, Romanova and Pavlova (2014, 500) argued that the meaning given to the concept of modernization has lost its precision. Opposing meanings have been loaded onto the concept of modernization, which has led to it becoming ‘an empty signifier’, that can mean anything and nothing (Romanova & Pavlova 2014, 500).

Nevertheless, the concept of modernization is used significantly both in national education policy documents by the national governments in Central Asian countries, as well as in education policy documents guiding the partnership with the EU and Central Asian countries. Policy documents present ideas, actions and policy programs, which have presumptions about the shared common ground. This means that these texts offer readers a joint starting point for communication that is believed to be shared among the readers. After independence, characteristics of the higher education principles were formulated. The current higher education system of Kyrgyzstan is characterized by its formal forms, including legal frameworks and principles.

#### **4.2.3 State Building and Higher Education**

After independence, leaders in Kyrgyzstan faced a set of difficulties, when producing the state principles. First, since all the Central Asian states are multi-ethnic, it was necessary to find a balance between a conservative ethno-nationalist public and the ethnic minorities. The Soviet tradition of treating ethnogenesis as the only possible explanation for the modern existence of an ethnic group is still predominant across the Central Asian region. Second, to obtain international recognition, leaders of Kyrgyzstan and other Central Asian countries had to face the concept of citizenship – the individual legal membership of a state. The question of citizenship and ethnicity was not easy for many leaders in Central Asia. Third, all the post-Soviet Central Asian political leaders needed to address the role of Islam in state ideologies. Fourth, since all Central Asian states were operating as an independent nation-state for the first time, the political elites of the countries needed to find their allies and the frames for the international cooperation.

When the Central Asian nations gained their independence because of the collapse of the Soviet Union in late 1991, their political elites quickly realized that the new states needed a unifying ideology to survive in a new situation. National ideologies filled this vacuum. As Marat (2008,12) argues: “National ideologies were a crucial element in the process of state-building in the independent Central Asian states”. At the time of independence, there were more than ninety nationalities and ethnic groups in Kyrgyzstan, ethnic Russians, Uzbeks, Uighurs,

Jews, and Germans. Marat (2008, 14) continues that the first president of Kyrgyzstan was more liberal with the definition of citizenship than any other head of state in Central Asia during the first few years of independence. Akayev differentiated between the concepts of 'nationality' (natsionalnost) and 'people' (narod). While the concept of 'nationality' referred to ethnic groups, the second term 'people' embodied a more inclusive, civic-based understanding almost synonymous with citizenship. According to Akayev, the two concepts co-existed in Kyrgyzstan, and their coherence was vital for the country. Marat (2008, 15) wrote about the first president Akayev's crucial role in the following manner:

“In his public speeches, he elaborated on the importance of revisiting the Soviet understanding of ethnicity. More than his Central Asian compatriots, Akayev emphasized that democracy is a means for eradicating ethno-nationalistic views, and he often used term *mezhdunarodnoe soglasie* (international accord). Here 'international' meant relations between the nationalities living in Kyrgyzstan. In his early addresses to the nation, Akayev warned that nationalism in Kyrgyzstan is risky if promulgated by former communists and socialists. Instead, he called for revival of traditions that existed in pre-Soviet times that could have a positive impact on contemporary politics.”

During the first years of independence Akayev also highlighted the importance of Russian influence in economic development as well as in introducing high standards in education. However, Akayev's civic-based ideas were not as successful and persuasive as they attempted to be. In practice, despite Akayev's liberal ideas this led to a rise in more conservative views of what should constitute national ideological beliefs. Anyhow, Akayev made a greater effort than any other Central Asian leader to distance his nation from Soviet historical traditions and concepts of citizenship, nationality, and ethnicity (Marat 2008, 23). He also used the *Manas* epic, the world's longest oral narration and a poetic jewel of the Kyrgyz cultural traditions, to achieve his goals.

Studies in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan emphasize that the sympathy for re-traditionalization was unfolding in the context of the economic uncertainty that has plagued countries in Central Asia since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Commercio (2014) argues that re-traditionalization is a bottom-up process initiated by women approaching adulthood in an environment characterized by long-term economic uncertainty. Based on the survey results, female respondents from both religious and secular institutions of higher education embrace the traditional religious and family values that the Soviet government attempted to suppress (Commercio 2014). Even though the number of students studying at the higher education institutions increased after independence, it did not mean that labor opportunities and conditions had improved. On the contrary, Commercio

(2014) argues that societal building blocks such as traditional values, family life and religion increased with economic uncertainty.

At the same time, when political leaders were dealing with domestic issues, Kyrgyzstan became a small, yet active player in global business networks. Marat (2015) argues that access to global financial institutions and availability of offshore markets strengthened a corrupt regime's grip on both political and economic matters and gave regime members a feeling of invincibility both domestically and globally. When the first two presidents of Kyrgyzstan, Akayev and Bakiyev, and their regimes and affiliates began losing political support at home, they started to act decisively on the front of the international actors to protect their wealth (Marat 2015). In the context of Central Asia, Kyrgyzstan benefited while accessing formal and informal global markets, meaning that a weak state loses its ability to control illegal outflows of finances in the face of global economic opportunities. Access to global markets and the process of political transitions opened opportunities for illegal actions and strengthened the shadow economy and patronage networks inside the state (Marat 2015).

#### **4.2.4 The Challenges of Higher Education in Kyrgyzstan**

In 1991, Kyrgyzstan declared independence from Moscow, and a democratic government was subsequently established and Askar Akayev was elected as the first president. After the Central Asian countries, including Kyrgyzstan, became independent, they faced a countless issues and problems in the education sector. Such problems were previously the preoccupation of the attention of former Soviet educators, who themselves had been created by the Soviet model of schooling or had resulted from economic and political difficulties of the 'transition' period. During the first 20 years of independence, most of the Eurasian nation-states of the former Soviet Union introduced major changes in the higher education sector, yet one of the areas within higher education where most changes have been made is the universities' admission practices. The area of admission practices in the former Soviet Union has undergone significant changes due to the fact that during the Soviet time, personal relations played a big role in university admission, yet even today, this continues to be the case. This has provided the impetus to reform the mechanisms of access to higher education which provide a gateway to elite status in society in both the Soviet sphere and as post-Soviet reality. This has been due to the primary reason for the on-going tertiary admission reform being extensive admission corruption that has risen dramatically in the post-Soviet period. The mission has focused on eliminating nepotism, bribery and the allocation of budget and contract places to the students in the state's universities. A study (Clark, 2005) undertaken by the Ministry of Education and Science and the Moscow School of Economics indicates that higher education was the most corrupt sector of Russian society, as at least half of all families reported

paying bribes to instructors and admission officials. Due the common Soviet past, behavior of this type is visible all over the former Soviet Union.

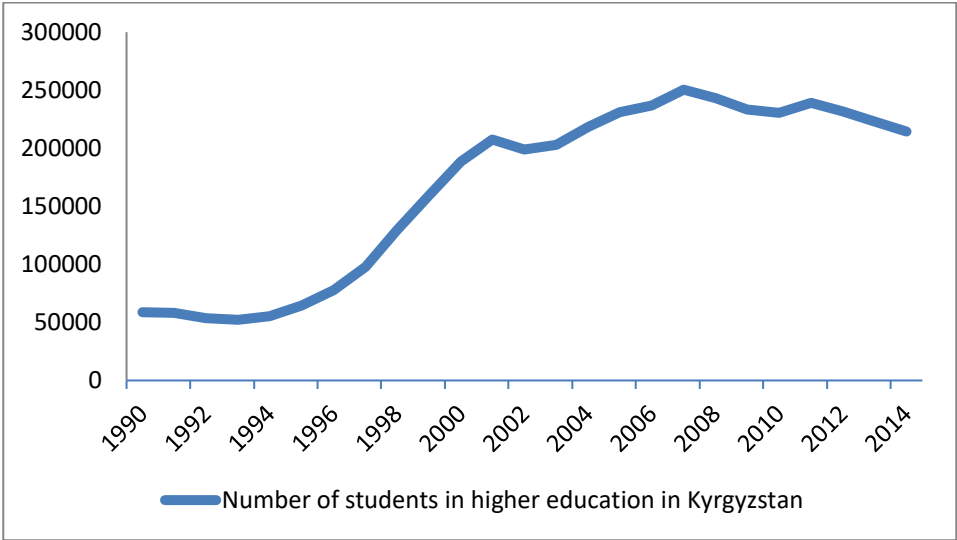
Scholars (e.g. DeYoung 2006) argued that the former Soviet Republics which became part of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) faced similar fiscal problems and challenges of national – state building after the independence. DeYoung (2006, 501–502) outlined three general types of educational crisis that all CIS countries faced to either a smaller or larger scale during the 1990s. The first challenge was expenditure decline, when the state budgets were negatively affected during the ‘transition’ period and the CIS countries confronted a loss of school operating funds from the state budget due to moving from a planned economy to a market economy. Teachers’ wages, building infrastructure, learning materials and even heating in the school building suffered 50 percent education budget cuts throughout the CIS countries.

The second challenge involves issues related to decentralization and destabilization of education administration. Devolving school finance and building management to local government was not well planned and, in some regions, there was no taxing authority to pay teachers’ salaries and for school equipment. There were few funds to support alternative organizational strategies and regional governmental bodies to establish.

The third challenge was described by DeYoung (2006, 501–502) as economic and structural ‘anomalies’, which means that schools or local authorities did not have budget allocations or decision-making powers to allocate funds for individual schools or inside the schools. Also, efficiency, accountability and the lack of measurable learning objectives for students are considered to be economic and structural ‘anomalies’ by foreign donors.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the most visible changes have been continued expansion of the higher education sector. Higher education institutions have increased from fewer than ten to about 50 and almost every second secondary school graduate now becomes a university student (DeYoung 2003, 158). Admission to higher education study was highly competitive during the Soviet times and most occupations available through universities were prestigious. After the independence of Kyrgyzstan, enrolment to the university increased from 10 percent to 40 percent (see Figure 4 Expansion of student enrolments in higher education in Kyrgyzstan). This ‘mobility’ movement was part of the first president Akaev’s political leadership and the democratization process in Kyrgyzstan to open the higher education sector to commercial interests as well as willingness to get young people occupied and getting them ‘off the street’ (Öraz 2013, 33–35). Higher education disciplines increased significantly when new specialization programs were introduced, such as those to produce lawyers, business managers, accountants and international relations specialists. The number of higher education specializations increased from 83 to 806 by 2001 (DeYoung 2011, 8–9). After independence, the government was unable to support these changes that

the education system was facing. Also, the mobility of people has caused major problems in education, including a shortage of teachers. Many teachers have left Kazakhstan and moved to Russia, where the living conditions are believed to be comparatively better or the most talented teachers left to work in the private sector. Dramatic changes in society as well as ‘mobility’ of people to the higher education reconstructed the education system in Kyrgyzstan.



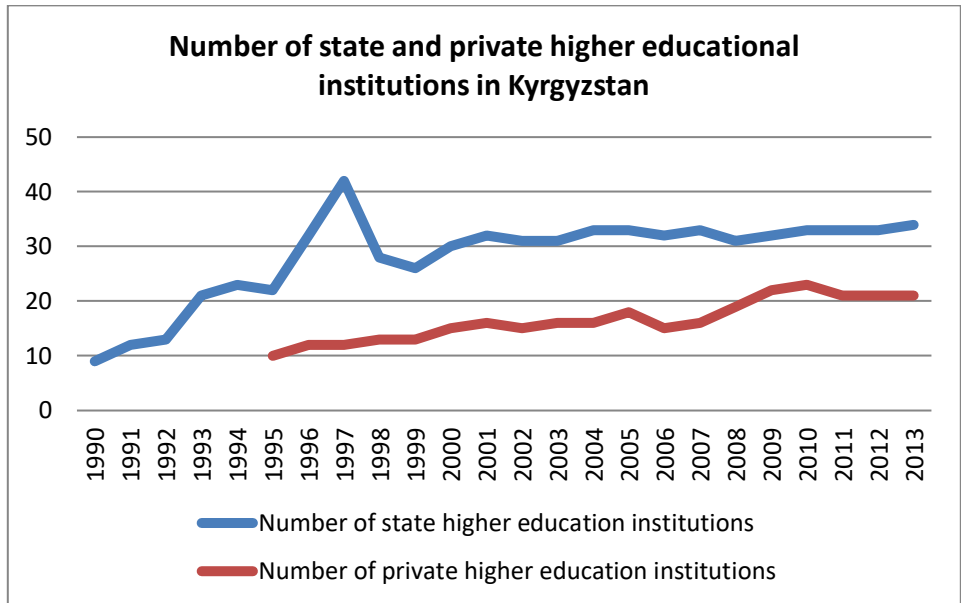
**Figure 4.** Expansion of student enrolments in higher education in Kyrgyzstan (National Statistical Committee, 2016).

In his research, DeYoung (2011) found that what passes as a university, what it means to be student, and what it means to study in Kyrgyzstan have all been redefined over the past 20 years, and that these redefinitions are driven by contemporary political, economic and cultural factors. The number of universities and students has increased dramatically since independence in 1991 (see Figure 5). Slightly more than half of secondary student enter universities. According to the OECD (2008), it appears that Kyrgyzstan has one of the largest private funding sources in higher education in the world. Concurrently the level of secondary education has decreased, and secondary education has experienced significant declines in funding, infrastructure and teachers’ qualifications.

Also, unlike during the Soviet era, today’s universities no longer have direct links to the employment of their graduates. DeYoung’s research points out that nowadays, students are not same sorts of young people who were in higher education institutions previously, and the academic culture of the universities is far different now than before. Findings show how students understand that receiving a qualification from the university is necessary but not enough for future



employment. Family and friendship connections are important as well, if not the most important single factor in gaining future employment. Among the latent functions of the university are allowing rural young people to move to the city from the villages and keeping the younger generation off the streets and out of politics overall. Many students are enrolled at university because there is no other place to go. Also, parents are willing to pay high tuition fees due the high prestige of higher education. In many cases, the value of the formal qualification is greater than the value of the knowledge gained.



**Figure 5.** Number of higher education institutions (National Statistical Committee, 2016).

This transfer in the higher education sector is not visible only in transition countries. The number of private universities has increased all over the world during the last few decades. In former Soviet countries, the legacy of heavy state control over the higher education institutions has enhanced the development of private universities, because they are independent of state control (Morley 2003, 8–9). The transformation of higher education has led to university education being available to a wider public and university qualifications are no longer specifically linked to actual jobs as they once were (DeYoung 2013, 158). Not only in Kyrgyzstan, but also in Russia it has been stated that the numbers of students and universities have increased, and the quality of education has decreased (e.g. Kuzmenko, Lunin & Ryzhova 2006; Zapetskii 2006; Shabanov 2005.)

#### **4.2.5 Legal Frameworks of Higher Education**

In December 1992, the government of Kyrgyzstan adopted a Law ‘On Education’ to reorient educational reform in the new political-economic context. This was followed by a series of new laws and strategies aimed to structurally transforming the system along the lines of international recommendations to adopt certain principles of the European Bologna Process. Education in Kyrgyzstan is organized in a comprehensive system of upbringing (vospitanie) and training established in the interest of the individual, society and the state of Kyrgyzstan in order to assure the moral, intellectual and physical health of the nation. Article 2 of the Law on Education stipulates that all citizens have the right to education regardless of sex, nationality, language, social status, political or religious belief:

“Citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic have the right to education regardless of gender, nationality, language, social and property status, type and nature of employment, religion, political and religious beliefs, place of residence and other circumstances.” (Law on Education, Article 2)

Education in the country is based on the principles proclaimed in international agreements (e.g. goals of global programs like Millennium Development and Education for All), as well as in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Ministry of Education and Science is the main body that organizes and coordinates activity for the implementation of the planned reforms. The Ministry creates working groups and pilot projects under which methodologies, technologies, procedures and draft normative documents are developed. The overall development plans and strategies for the education sector are reflected in the Education Development Strategy. The first was for the period 2005–2010 and the existing Development Strategy for Education is for 2012–2020.

In accordance with the Constitution, amended in 2007 and 2010, every citizen of the Kyrgyz Republic has the right to education and the general basic education is compulsory and free of charge. (Article 32 of the 2007 Constitution). However, the Law on Education in 2003 enabled schools and higher education institutions to charge admission or tuition fees (Law on Education, Article 38), but the Kyrgyzstan government continues to provide public scholarships for higher education study. The Law on Education was updated in 2003. Based on the Law on Education, the main sources of funding the education is the republic and local budget. Additional sources of funding education include tuition fees, funds of enterprises, organizations, public associations and foundations and foreign countries (Law on Education, Article 38).

The Bologna agenda had a significant impact on the structure of academic degrees within the Kyrgyz higher education system. Today, the Soviet era two-cycle system, which consists of a specialist diploma degree and an advanced

aspirantura, coexists with the Bologna three-cycle system, which prepares students at bachelor's and master's levels. The Law on Education says:

“Higher applied education includes the training and retraining of bachelors, specialists and masters in order to meet the needs of the individual in the deepening and expansion of education on the basis of secondary general, secondary vocational and higher vocational education.” (Law on Education, Article 22)

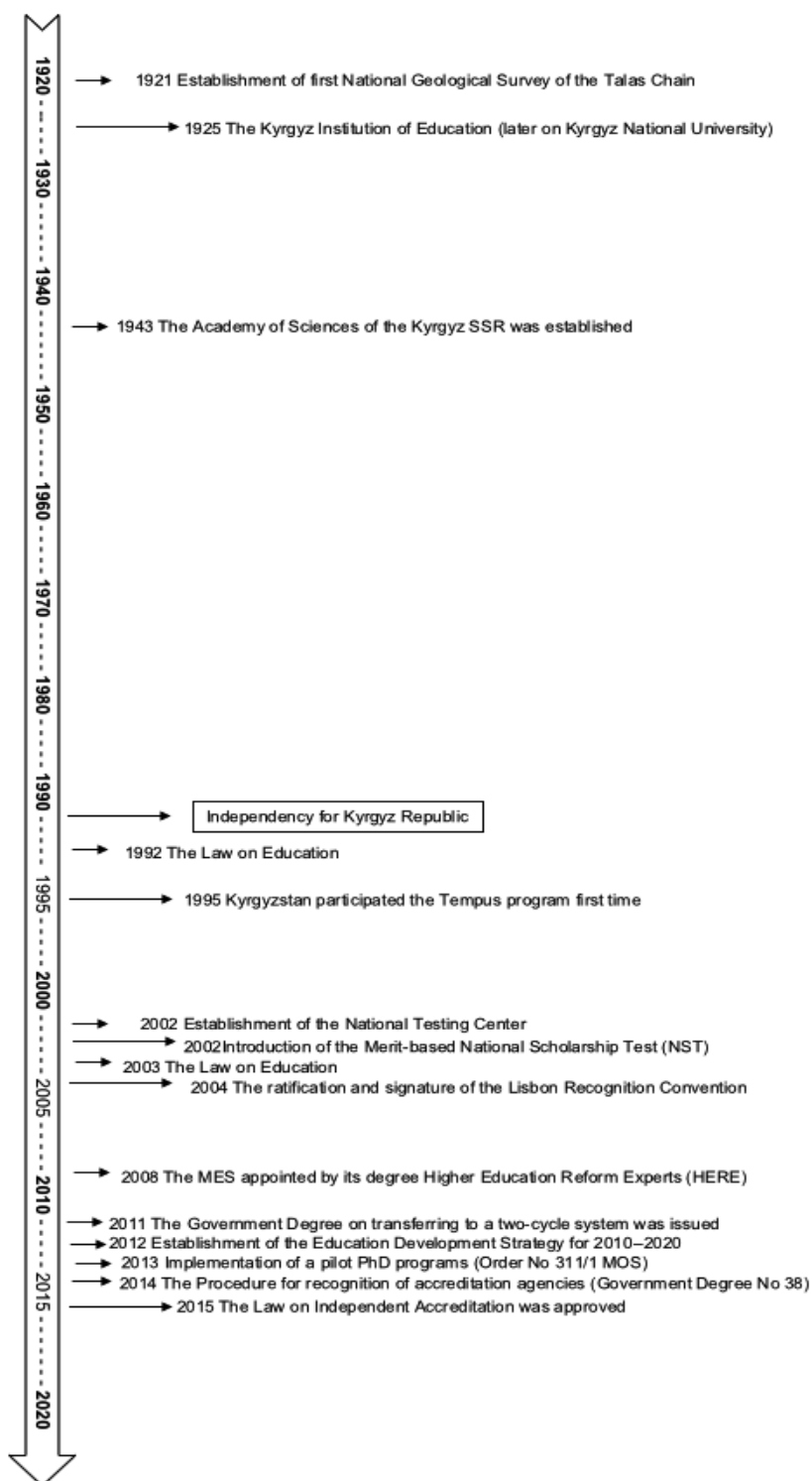
As a part of the Bologna Process reforms, Kyrgyzstan moved towards independent accreditation of academic program. In 2013, the government of Kyrgyzstan amended the Law on Education to change the accreditation system of the country (Law on Education, Article 35). The Ministry of Education and Sciences introduced a set of regulations<sup>3</sup> for independent accreditation, which the government accepted. Those regulations provided a framework for the independent accreditation agencies and for the higher education institutions. The National Accreditation Council (NAC) is a body that implements the requirements introduced by the government of Kyrgyzstan. The NAC functions under the control of the Ministry of Education and Sciences. The most important amendments in the Law on Education was the changes that gave higher education institutions the right to award their own diplomas instead of state diplomas:

“Accredited educational organizations have the right to award its graduates a state approved document (diploma), or their own documents according to their own decision of the educational organization” (Law on Education, Article 40)

The amendments of the law allowed higher education institutions to pursue their own degrees. The timeline (Figure 6) depicts the key historical changes implemented in Kyrgyzstan's higher education sector. The timeline consists of changes that can be characterized as legal, governmental or systematical changes. These changes provided a framework based on which higher education institutions operate.

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<sup>3</sup> Regulations on National Accreditation Council under MoES, No 438, August 2014. Regulations Recognizing Accreditation Agencies, No 670, September 2015. Regulations on Accreditation of Educational Institutions and Programs, No 670, September 2015. The Minimum Requirements for Educational Organizations of Elementary, Secondary and Higher Education Levels of the KR, No 525, June 2016.



**Figure 6.** Timeline of the development of higher education in Kyrgyzstan.

#### **4.2.6 International Cooperation in Higher Education Sector**

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the role of Islam has become more visible. Kyrgyzstan is divided ethnically between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks and geographically north and south. The state is deeply corrupt and does not deliver basic services, justice and law enforcement (ICG 2016). In the absence of reliable state and economic opportunities, growing numbers of citizens are taking recourse in religion. The 39 mosques of 1990 are more than 2,300 today. Islamic civil society organizations have more than doubled since 2000, by offering services that the state is unable to provide. These organizations represent different interpretations of Islam from tolerant to radical forms. The main concern is that because of the weakness and corruption of the state, poverty, unemployment, inadequate education, frustration with daily life for women, growing numbers of citizens are looking to Islam for political identity and a source of authority. In the study of International Crisis Group field research in 2015 religious' leaders, teachers and security officials around the country highlighted the lack of educational opportunities, secular and religious, as a national concern and identified the decline in service provision, poor governance and ethnic tensions as the context in which radicalization occurs (ICG 2016, 3).

Western countries have been concerned about radical Islam and its influence to fill the ideological emptiness that the collapse of the Soviet Union created. Before 2014, and the establishment of Islamic State (IS) in Syria, Turkey was an important stabilizer actor and the role model of "secular democracy". (E.g. Demir, Balci & Akkok 2000). Also, cultural understanding between Kyrgyz and Turkish families is important, as the role of family values is important in both cultures. Demir, Balci and Akkok (2000) conducted research on the roles of Turkish schools in the educational system and social transformation of Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan in the transition period. They found that parents in Turkish schools were involved in their children's education and parents were satisfied with their close relationship with the school. Also, this study shows how parents are satisfied with Turkish schools as they filled a value gap which has emerged in the transition period and train well-behaved and disciplined individuals who control their life. Turkish influence in Central Asia and Kyrgyzstan is significant because of its strong cultural, ethnic and linguistic ties with Central Asian countries. Concurrently Russia and European Union education policy have been important actors in the education sector as well as in building a civil society.

Since the 1990s, cooperation between the European Union and Central Asian countries has intensified and stabilized. Education is a field in which the EU and Central Asian countries have a strong mutual interest due to the fact that European educational standards such as the Bologna Process provide an avenue for Central Asian states to be part of the international educational community. Furthermore, the relatively depoliticized nature of education in comparison to other possible fields of cooperation like trade policy, energy or security policy, provides a way

for the EU to engage in Central Asia in a manner acceptable to the Central Asian autocratic governments.

A cooperation agreement between the EU and Central Asian partners, the EU-Central Asia Strategy for a new Partnership, was adopted in June 2007 to foster the modernization of the region. The EU-Central Asia Strategy for a new Partnership includes the Education Initiative for Central Asia (EUEI) “to contribute to the adaptation of the education systems of Central Asian states to the needs of the globalized world and to cooperate with major international partners and donors supporting educational programmes and institutions.” (European Commission 2016). The EU’s regional strategy for providing assistance to Central Asian higher education plays a key role in economic growth and poverty eradication as improving the educational standards and opportunities in Central Asia provides an option for the Central Asian states to tap into global value chains and climb up them. In the framework of the EUEI, the EU is working toward uniting Central Asian countries with the European Education Area. Support for higher education in Central Asia takes place through programs like Erasmus (currently Erasmus +) and Tempus (currently Tempus +).

Since the 2000s, Russia has been eager to increase cooperation in the field of quality assurance of education with international actors and to export its own quality assurance model, to the post-Soviet space as well as to former socialist states in Asia and Africa. In the 2000s, the concept of quality became a defining feature of higher education policy in Russia (Bolotov and Efremova 2007). The concept of quality is often employed in the ongoing reforms of the education sector reforms in Russia. In many discussions on higher education policy, the concept of quality is connected to future challenges of the education system and to cooperation between society, labor markets, state and higher education institutions (e.g. Bestuzhev-Lada 2001; Kovaleva 2003). Russia is taking a major role in educational quality assurance in CIS countries where Russia has also exported higher education services by establishing branch offices of Russian universities abroad (Russian federal target program 2006–2010).

In 2008, Russia signed a cooperation agreement with the World Bank on a USD 32 million trust fund for a five-year period for Russian Education Aid for Development (READ 2009). The READ program is a collaborative program of the Government of Russia and the World Bank, which aims to improve basic education quality. The READ program focuses its support on student assessment by concentrating on institutional strengthening of national educational quality assurance functions in low-income countries like Angola, Armenia, Ethiopia, the Kyrgyz Republic, Mozambique, Tajikistan, Vietnam and Zambia (READ 2009). The READ program is the only program managed by the World Bank, which provides dedicated support for education quality and for student learning assessment (READ 2009, 8.) Through this project, Russia was taking a new role as a donor country and becoming a more significant player within educational

development aid, which has given Russia more opportunities to be heard in the global education policy field (Takala & Piattoeva 2012).

Cooperation with Russia takes place through a range of sectors. In 2015, Kyrgyzstan joined the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) as a fifth member. Although Kyrgyzstan is the only country that has joined the Eurasian Economic Union in addition to its founding members, the EEU is the most comprehensive form of economic cooperation in the former Soviet Union. According to the Kremlin's view, the EEU is a supranational player comparable to the European Union. However, connecting the Crimean Peninsula to Russia and the conflict in Ukraine have revealed the true meaning of the EEU project – the goal of strengthening the influence of Russia on the Soviet territory and isolating the former Soviet Union from the West and China. (Jarosiewicz & Fischer, 2018).

Russia has put forward its own integration regime, the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), and has actively sought to attract new members, as a compensation for integration with the European Union (Ademmer, Delcour & Wolczuk 2016). For Central Asian countries the EEU offers more tangible opportunities for cooperation in the labor market than the EU. In the region of Central Asia current barriers in the field of labor and education, different alphabets, visa regimes and poverty minimize the opportunity for education in other republics and the exchange of students (Nessipbayeva & Delayeva 2013, 394). Opening access to universities and recognition of their awards foster's innovation and competitiveness in the Central Asian region and is one of the aims behind the EEU cooperation. As a result, the countries of Central Asia are located between the enlarged EU and Russia, cooperation with the EU and EEU has increasingly become an object of contention and rivalry between Brussels and Moscow (Haukkala 2015, 27).

#### **4.2.7 Travelling Reforms in Higher Education of Kyrgyzstan**

The principles of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) have affected the development of higher education system of Kyrgyzstan. The government of Kyrgyzstan has been eagerly adopting different travelling reforms of the Bologna Process and adopting the principles of the EHEA. European influences are widespread, even though higher education institutions and the Ministry of Education and Sciences (MoES) engages in bilateral cooperation with other partners as well, for example with Turkey, Russia and China. Also, the influences of international organizations (such as the World Bank and the Soros Foundation) is important in donor-dependent Kyrgyzstan. The major reforms in the field of higher education of Kyrgyzstan have been the following: the reform of university admission, reforms related to the Bologna Process and the reform of independent accreditation. However, in this study, I am not only looking at the specific higher education-related reforms, but my focus is the phenomenon behind the

international influences, 'best-practices' and borrowed ideas. I use the concept of travelling reforms to describe this phenomenon.

These travelling reforms are not only shaping the structures and the system of higher education, but they also affect the ideology of higher education. Soviet higher education was influenced by the ideas about the harmfulness of competition and the need for central planning in general. Soviet higher education was the long-term normative work on the removal of 'competition'. (Rezaev & Starikov 2017, 132). One of the first travelling reforms has been the establishment of the National Testing Center. In 2002, the Minister of Education called for a major reform to change the admission tests for higher education institutions and to initiate national testing in Kyrgyzstan. Kyrgyzstan established its assessment agency to design and conduct standardized external admission tests in place of oral entrance examinations (Drummond & Gabrscek 2012). There was no standardized entrance test or examination in the Soviet Union. Even though this reform does not directly target higher education, it has a significant impact on students moving into higher education. The National Scholarship Test (NST) was introduced to promote fair and merit-based access to budget-funded higher education places in Kyrgyzstan. Before the introduction of the NST, the whole selection process was described as unfair, corrupt and discriminatory for students from remote regions and from poorer families (Shamatov 2012, 76).

During the Soviet years, university entrance was merit-based only in theory, but exam results could be manipulated and the whole examination process was affected by nepotism, favoritism and a lack of transparency. Moreover, those who had connections or could use bribes were in a stronger position to secure enrolment in the higher education institutions than those without connections and from poorer backgrounds. (Shamatov 2012).

The introduction of the NST was the first substantial education reform that the Ministry of Education and Sciences implemented with the support of international partners. The reforms were undertaken with the help of the American Councils for Collaboration in Education and Language Study (ACCELS) and the financial support of USAID (Shamatov 2010). In 2004, the National Scholarship Test (NST) project also created an independent testing organization, the Centre for Educational Assessment and Teaching Methods (CEATM), which took over the development and administration of NST in Kyrgyzstan.

After the university admission reforms, the main priority for the Ministry of Education and Sciences for higher education has been the integration into the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and the Bologna Process. The government of Kyrgyzstan has been taking steps to achieve this goal, such as the amendments to the Law of Education to change the structure of higher education to a dual-degree model (bachelor and master degrees), implementation of European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) and establishment of an independent accreditation system. With these higher education policies,



Kyrgyzstan has chosen to follow the models of European Higher Education Area and related education policies.

Central Asian countries have followed the principles of the Bologna Process, even though only Kazakhstan has been able to ratify the Bologna declaration (in 2010). The eligibility criteria for membership of the Bologna Process were redefined at the Prague meeting in 2003 and it provided opportunities for countries in the post-socialist space to join the EHEA by the ratification of the European Cultural Convention:

“Countries party to the European Cultural Convention shall be eligible for membership of the European Higher Education Area provided that they at the same time declare their willingness to pursue and implement the objectives of the Bologna Process in their own systems of higher education.” (Berlin Communiqué, 2003)

This redefining of the principles made it possible for other post-socialist countries to follow the Bologna Process. Russia ratified the Bologna Process in 2003. Kyrgyzstan ratified the Lisbon Recognition Convention in 2004, but it is not a party to the European Cultural Convention of the Council of Europe because of its geographical location. In Kyrgyzstan, the Bologna Process principles are implemented with support of the TEMPUS (Trans-European Mobility Programme for University Studies). TEMPUS is one of the largest EU-funded programs in the field of education. No particular reforms have been implemented within the TEMPUS program, but it is one of the more significant financial instruments in the field of higher education in the Partner Countries<sup>4</sup> outside the EU, namely in Eastern Europe, Central Asia, the western Balkans and in the Southern Mediterranean. TEMPUS supports higher education institutions in partner countries and is aiming to fund multilateral partnership between EU and partner countries. The European Commission paper “Overview of the Higher Education Systems in the Tempus Partner Countries” says that TEMPUS supports three types of projects. One of them is joint projects:

“Joint Projects target higher education institutions and fund multilateral partnerships between these EU and Partner Country institutions, to develop, modernize and disseminate new curricula, teaching methods and teaching materials. They also aim to enhance

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<sup>4</sup> Tempus Partner Countries: Albania, Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Egypt, Georgia, Israel, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Lebanon, Libya, Moldova, Montenegro, Morocco, the occupied Palestinian territory, Russia, Serbia, Syria, Tajikistan, Tunisia, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan and Kosovo.

quality assurance mechanisms in institutions, modernize the governance and management of higher education institutions and strengthen their contribution to lifelong learning and the ‘knowledge triangle’ of ‘education-research-innovation’ (ECEA, 2012).

Thus, the TEMPUS program has similar principals to the Bologna Process – lifelong learning, quality assurance mechanisms, new governance culture and knowledge production via education-research-innovation triangle, even they are not directly named to promote certain reforms.

There has been various research, which has examined the implementation of the Bologna Process in post-socialist countries. Those pieces of research have been mainly interested in comparing the implemented reforms with the Bologna Process guidelines. For example, Soltys (2015) describes the implementation of the Bologna Process reforms in 13 post-socialist countries. By 2010, those countries gained membership and started to implement Bologna Process reforms. Soltys (2015) argues that, in most post-socialist countries, Bologna Process reform implementation start from the top, because state had historically monopolized power. However, implementation of the reforms has demonstrated that policymakers are not familiar with academic culture at the institutional level, which has caused difficulties in implementing Bologna reforms. Soltys (2015, 191–192) found structural similarities of the socialist legacy in these post-socialist countries, which are the weak civic society and state capacity, use of bureaucracies and regulations in top-down reforms efforts, underestimated depth of cultural and institutional change by governments, indifferent governmental engagement of the market and private sector, and indifferent governmental engagement with academic communities. Soltys (2015) highlights in his study that the Bologna Process reforms will not be successful without active involvement of institutional-level actors. Many of the post-socialist countries have thus far been unable to fully implement Bologna reforms, because of difficulties in bringing new ideas into countries with very different cultural values (Soltys 2015, 179–180).

In 2004, the Kyrgyz government, through a Working Group of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic on the Integration of higher education institutions of Kyrgyzstan into the Bologna Process and the National Office of the EU Tempus–Tacis program, signed a Memorandum of Agreement to integrate its higher education institutions into the Bologna Process (National Tempus Office Kyrgyzstan 2016). Kyrgyzstan follows the principles of the Bologna Process and EHEA closely, even if the government has not signed official declarations<sup>5</sup>. Since

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<sup>5</sup> European Cultural Convention or Bologna Declaration.

independence, the government of Kyrgyzstan has implemented higher education reforms based on the Bologna process principles and in an attempt to integrate Kyrgyz higher education into the European education system. The quality assurance mechanisms are central in the Bologna Process. In adopting guidelines for quality assurance and evaluation, the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)<sup>6</sup> are followed closely. Since 2005, in the framework of ESG the paradigm shift towards recognition and the promotion of the use of learning outcomes has occurred within the principles of quality assurance. The latest amendments were adopted in 2015 by the Ministers responsible for higher education in the European Higher Education Area. The ESG principles are based on the following four principles for quality assurance in the EHEA:

“Higher education institutions have primary responsibility for the quality of their provision and its assurance;  
Quality assurance responds to the diversity of higher education systems, institutions, programmes and students;  
Quality assurance supports the development of a quality culture;  
Quality assurance takes into account the needs and expectations of students, all other stakeholders and society.” (ESG 2015, 8)

The criteria of independent accreditation in Kyrgyzstan is based on the principles of the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG 2015). Currently, there are five independent accreditation agencies for quality assurance in education in Kyrgyzstan: the Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (EdNet), the Accreditation Agency for Educational Programs and Organizations (AAEPO), the Agency for Accreditation of Educational Organizations and Programs (Sapattuu Bilim), Independent Accreditation Agency (Bilim – Standart) and Independent Accreditation Agency (El Baasy).

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<sup>6</sup> The Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) were adopted by the Ministers responsible for higher education in 2005 following a proposal prepared by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) in co-operation with the European Students' Union (ESU), the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE) and the European University Association (EUA).

### **4.3 Studying Domestication of Higher Education in Kyrgyzstan**

Previous sections presented the outlines of the political and economic principles of Kyrgyzstan in the context of Central Asia, as well as the historical development of the higher education system in the country. This chapter discusses how the chosen approach of domestication can contribute to the field of higher education studies in post-socialist countries and Kyrgyzstan. First, Kyrgyzstan has been widely studied from the perspective of internationalization providing an interesting angle of insight into the broader Central Asian education policy context. Comparing other Central Asian countries, the higher education system of Kyrgyzstan has been studied by international scholars more than other higher education systems.

During the early period of independence, reforms of higher education was underpinned by the notion of bringing democratic values, internationalization, and ethnic and religious peace to the society. The key role was played by President Akaev by concentrating on the development of social and political organizations.

Moreover, internationalization has become more or less intentionally an important component of the current transformation of the Kyrgyz universities. Since independence, the state-funding for higher education has been in decline and for many higher education institutions, international cooperation is also a way to collect external funding. For many higher education institutions, internationalization is an essential component of their institutional development. First, internationalization in the Kyrgyz context is a way to bring donor interest and foreign direct investment to the higher education sector, which is severely underfunded with significant difficulties in keeping key staff in place, due to the relatively poor state of the Kyrgyz economy and state finances. The internationalization activities in Kyrgyzstan may include: inviting faculty members holding degrees from distinguished international universities, publishing in the leading international research journals, introducing English language instruction and dual-degree programs, getting involved in interinstitutional collaborations with education institutions abroad, and others. Each institution finds its own path to internationalization depending on its location, size and profile.

Teleshaliyev (2013) points out in his article that teachers have limited opportunities to participate actively in shaping their ‘professionalism’. Teachers in Kyrgyzstan are facing two policy tendencies in two different systems: western managerialism and the legacy of Soviet ideology. Managerialism, according to which, all problems have managerial solutions, dominates the education system and reform thinking by many international donors. International donors use political control imposed from top, which has several consequences for teachers and teaching, for example more centralized curriculum mandates, longer hours of

work and teaching for the test. At the same time, the legacy of Soviet professionalism is still visible in Kyrgyzstan, under which teachers are simply informed about decision and not consulted at all.

Earlier research had shed light on how locally embedded practices and longer socio-historical, political and economic practices and discourses facilitate the education transformation in post-socialist countries (e.g. Minina et al 2018). For instance, comparative studies on national interpretations of quality assurance reforms in Russia, China and Brazil has demonstrated that borrowing of global reforms can actually be locally based political projects and practical solutions (Minina et al 2018). In the context of Kyrgyzstan, the paradigm between internationalization and localization is considerable. Even though travelling reforms and globally inspired ideas are widely spread in the higher education system of Kyr-gyzstan, local and national features must be taken into account.

Steiner-Khamsi, Silova and Johnson (2006, 239) argue that when we are studying travelling policies, the timing when global reform is adopted or borrowed is important, whether reforms are borrowed at an early, middle or late stage (Steiner-Khamsi, Silova and Johnson 2006, 221). Earlier studies of outcome-based education reforms in post-Soviet countries in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan and Mongolia, have shown that actual reforms have varied considerably between these countries. Even though the reform package presented in different post-Soviet countries at the beginning of the debate did not differ significantly, reforms acquired different meanings in different national contexts. Policy rhetoric became remarkably similar across the region after the collapse of Soviet Union in 1991.

Most of the post-socialist countries moved from a socialist education policy to more western-oriented approaches (See Silova 2011). These reforms started from the higher education sector and the idea was to establish a National Scholarship Test (NST) to provide fair access to universities (Steiner-Khamsi, Silova and Johnson 2006, 226). In the end, these reforms also touched general education as teachers were retrained, lawmakers institutionalized reforms and aid agencies pushed their neoliberal best practices (Steiner-Khamsi, Silova and Johnson 2006, 228). The role of the USAID behind these reforms and in the domestic field battle was significant and international pressure became visible and arguments related to national and cultural traditions were silent. Eventually during the process there became strong attitudes against American-led educational reforms and nostalgic thoughts about the Soviet educational system (Steiner-Khamsi, Silova and Johnson 2006, 225).

As written earlier, there are various terms to describe this fundamental change in higher education policy in Kyrgyzstan. In this research I have utilized the term travelling reforms to describe the changes made in the higher sector in Kyrgyzstan. Simultaneously, I have argued that in one way or another, the reforms implemented in the higher education sector in Kyrgyzstan are linked to international principles and models. However, my interest is not only in studying

how the government of Kyrgyzstan has adopted the international language of global reforms, standardization and different internationally inspired reforms. Instead, my focus is to examine the domestication process – how actors in the field of higher education compound national, cultural, and historical aspects into the travelling reforms.

## 5 DOMESTICATION DISCOURSES

In earlier chapters, I discussed the backgrounds to this study, namely the methodological approach of discursive analysis (Chapter 2), the theoretical approach to domestication (Chapter 3) and the development of the higher education sector of Kyrgyzstan (Chapter 4). In this chapter, I examine how travelling reforms are debated within the higher education sector in Kyrgyzstan. From the empirical data I divided them into three key discourses of domestication of travelling reforms. Through these three discourses, the dynamics of the post-Soviet transformation becomes visible. The discourses are:

- I. Discourse on quality
- II. Discourse on modernization
- III. Discourse on internationalization

The empirical research data have been drawn from policy document analyses of the key guiding higher education policy documents, and interviews with the rectors of the universities and other actors from higher education. Each of the discourses is described in its own section. First, I have described the discursive shift of the concepts of these discourses – quality, modernization and internationalization – and then demonstrate the use of these concepts in the field of higher education in Kyrgyzstan. The definitions of these concepts are closely linked to the discourses they are presenting. I investigated the metaphors and word choices behind those concepts. Second, I have presented the operationalization of the concepts and have analyzed the action attached to each discourse. The analysis focuses how different actors use discourses to justify their understanding of higher education policy. In the following table (in Table 3) an overview of the analytical focusses in each of the three discourses are described.

Discourse	Focus of the discourse	Analytical focus
I Discourse on quality	Analysis of the policy shift in higher education and new policy guidelines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analysis of the discourse on quality: how is the quality perceived by different actors?</li> <li>• Which themes are crucial for the discourse on the quality?</li> <li>• How are these themes justified or rejected in the discourse on quality?</li> <li>• Analysis of the quality assurance and evaluation reforms: metaphors and reasoning of these reforms</li> </ul>
II Discourse on modernization	The transformation and development of the HE and implementation travelling reform	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analysis of discourse on modernization: how is the modernization perceived by different actors?</li> <li>• Which themes are crucial for the discourse on modernization?</li> <li>• Focus on activity involved in modernization: how is the reform of accreditation justified and opposed at the field of HE?</li> <li>• Analysis of role of different national actors: how do the roles of actors affect the acceptance of international reforms?</li> </ul>
III Discourse on internationalization	The dynamics of internationalization, global reforms and partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analysis of the discourse on internationalization: how is the internationalization perceived and conceptualized by different actors?</li> <li>• Analysis of the cooperation with different actors in the field of HE</li> <li>• Analysis of the impact of Russia on HE of Kyrgyzstan</li> <li>• Analysis of the reforms related to internationalization: Bologna Process</li> </ul>

**Table 3.** An overview of the analytical focus in the three discourses.

As written in an earlier chapter, the idea of a domestic field battle is that when actors are adopting new policy programs, they justify them by linking them into national, cultural and local features. Similarly, when policy programs are written, these new concepts are linked to the national and cultural context in the receiving country. When reforms or global discourses are rejected, decisions are combined with national interests. After gaining independence from the Soviet Union, the principles governing the higher education of Kyrgyzstan changed. New concepts such as quality and efficiency were introduced and at the same time old concepts such as modernization and equality got new meanings. Saarinen (2011) has written how cultural artifacts and phenomena both reflect what is happening in a society and contribute to current policy processes. In the sections that follow, the empirical findings are presented through these three discourses.

The empirical findings are presented through these three discourses in separate sections. First, is the discourse on the quality followed by the discourse on



modernization and the discourse on internationalization in the next two sections. A summary of the findings follows in Chapter 6. In that chapter I also discuss how the domestication of travelling reforms appears through these three discourses. How these discourses are combined and which parts of the discussion about travelling reforms is not covered within these discourses. Also, in Chapter 6, findings about these three discourses are discussed through Bourdieu's theory of discursive space. In discursive space, the current understanding of higher education system 'doxa' is either justified with the orthodoxical discourse and challenged by the heterodoxical discourse. With Bourdieu's framework of discursive space, it is possible to interpret the findings and deepen the understanding of the domestication of travelling reforms.

## **5.1 The Discourse on Quality**

The discourse on quality was widely used in the documentary and interview data. As written in Chapter 4, the higher education landscape in Kyrgyzstan has been reshaped by introduction of quality assurance and evaluation (QAU) practices in education. No comprehensive and systematic evaluation and assurance system existed in the Soviet Union. However, Kyrgyzstan was the first country in Central Asia to start implementing a nationwide system for education governance. A merit-based national university admission exam, a National Scholarship Test (NST) was introduced in 2002. The NST is administered by the National Testing Centre which is independent of both the Ministry of Education and higher education institutions. The National Testing Center was primarily set up to implement and carry out a merit-based national university admission exam. Establishment of the National Testing Center is seen as an example of a travelling reform.

The discourse on quality was one of the dominating discourses in the field of higher education in Kyrgyzstan. The discourse on quality was linked to the themes of higher education policy, the history of the education system, the national culture and issues related to labor market conditions.

### **5.1.1 Value of the History of Higher Education**

The concept of quality is a term much used to describe the education goals and purposes in the Education Development Strategy 2020. Increasing the quality of education is a goal that is easy to accept for the range of actors in the field. Quality and its importance are values that seem to be accepted unanimously. In interviews quality was described not only combining it with evaluation but also as a valuable goal through which the personal growth of the students could be aimed for. This is in contrast with the higher education policy documentations, which emphasize the measurable aspects of the quality. For example, in the Education Development

Strategy (EDS 2020) is stated that the aim is ‘systematic implementation of national measures designed to improve the quality of education in the Kyrgyz Republic in 2012–2020’ (EDS 2020, 3). However, the interview respondents exemplified their broad understanding of the education and learning by highlighting the immeasurable features of quality, such as the personal growth of the students. As one of the respondents of the public university said, the quality is possible to understand not only as the services that universities provide to students, but also the life skills that students can gain:

“This is a tough question. Quality is not only about accreditation, it is about services, even cultural things, good lectures, good communication, good presentations, good lectures, this is one side. Quality is also about having students who in the future can be important and demanded (desired) people. Higher education cannot provide students with all their competence now. Life competencies for me are an ability to solve the problems that you face. To do this, you need a comprehensive set of tools and skills. Success is part of quality too. Quality cannot be written on paper. My strategy is like this. There are many students and when they finish the university, my students found the best employment opportunities. I try to give my students these life skills too, knowledge that can be useful in life.” (B.1, No 11)<sup>7</sup>

In the interviews, the respondents highlighted the wide understanding of the quality of education by referring to aspects of quality other than evaluation and accreditation. The interviews conveyed the view that the existence of quality was introduced for the higher education institutions according to quantitative indicators. For the respondent from the public university, quality was more than accreditation and measurements. At the institutional level, actors had a strong understanding of the purpose of higher education that cannot be the only measurable factor. Education must be motivated and guided to produce transformational knowledge and increase educational achievements:

“My generation had strong educators. Then, the new generation was looking at quantity. When it comes to quality, they look at quantitative indicators, how many books, professors and so on, but this is not quality. Quality is when there are achievements either by students or teachers.” (B.1, No 6)

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<sup>7</sup> See the coding of the research data on Annex 3.

Simultaneously, representatives of public universities argued, that in higher education policy goals, prioritizing the quality measurements of higher education has happened at the same time with the decline of the level of quality. For instance, the quality aspects of higher education policy have been introduced into higher education goals on a large scale since independence. ‘Improving higher education quality assurance systems’ has become a priority policy area for higher education (EDS 2020, 25). Respondents from public higher education institutions particularly highlighted the importance of educational quality. From their perspective, the quality of education has been always important for the participants, promoters and designers of education, as well as for the higher education institutions. For them, the discourse on quality was divided – high quality education history and modern quality measurement.

Higher education in Kyrgyzstan has retained its strong belief in Soviet era education. In the Soviet Union, education was understood to be of high quality and excellent. The historical division between the level of Soviet education and current education becomes visible, as well as the different opinions that exist between the generations. At the higher education institutions, a significant proportion of the professors were educated during the Soviet era. Those generation had memories of high-quality higher education. Instead, the younger generation, representing private universities, did not share this understanding of history and for them, measurable quality factors were desirable. For example, one respondent from the private university highlighted the measurable aspects of the quality:

“Quality is something that can be measured, it needs to have an aspirational component, and we should be clear and strategic in terms of what we want to achieve through quality, and it must be programed. There need to be clear deliverables. Quality of education must speak to the competencies that the students receive. Regular assessment processes need to be used.” (B.2, No 9)

For the actors who understood quality as a measurable factor, the competencies rather than learning were important. Increasing ambitions to create a monitoring and evaluation system for quality control is connected to the decline in the level of the quality of education. In the discourse about the quality of higher education, respondents highlighted Soviet education. A high-quality Soviet education is a mutual understanding that is not questioned and is part of the ‘collective understanding’ of the education. However, the importance is not the collapse of the system and construction of the new system. As the interviewee pointed out in the previous quotation, the Soviet Education is a factor behind the national legacy, something to be proud of and move forward with it.

The question that arises in the transformation of the social system is whether the skills provided by the Soviet system could be transferred to a new market

economy. After two decades, this question still exists. The older generation of university professors and pedagogues value the Soviet education model. In the discourse on quality of Kyrgyzstan's higher education, the old Soviet education is appreciated. The voice of the academic community values the traditions of higher education. In the early post-Soviet period, learning new political ideas with told 'truths' was a way to balance between the two cultures – the old Soviet and the new market economy. Even decades later, these two cultures and traditions are alongside each other.

### **5.1.2 Creating an Efficient Management System**

The Education Development Strategy uses the concept of efficiency to emphasize the principles of productivity of the education system of Kyrgyzstan. In the discourse on quality, the concept of efficiency is used to illustrate the power of the flow of the market economy terminologies and arguments related to the monitoring and evaluations in Kyrgyzstan's higher education. Lawn and Segerholm (2011, 35) argue that even though there is no 'objective standard of efficiency', educational evaluations have led to the search for efficiency of education achievements. In this sub-section I empirically demonstrate this theoretical understanding of objectivity of quality in the field of higher education of Kyrgyzstan.

The concept of efficiency refers to how to achieve maximum productivity with minimum waste of effort or expense. The concept of efficiency is linked to the management of the education system. In the education development strategy, the monitoring and evaluation system is part of the management system. When the strategy describes purposes of the intended education system, the concepts of the market economy appears:

“Inadequate monitoring and evaluation system. Modern management and strategic planning are directly dependent on the integrated monitoring and evaluation system, including an independent one, which is currently absent in the education sector. Given the strategy of providing greater autonomy to schools and other educational institutions, it is important to determine the accountability mechanisms that ensure efficient, effective and transparent operation of autonomous educational institutions.” (EDS 2020, 30)

Within a short time after independence, the education development strategy had been reconstructed and the language of education had been developed with concepts closer to the market economy. The concept of efficiency was used in higher education in Kyrgyzstan in two ways; to describe something that operates systemically and someone with the competencies to work productively. First, in

EDS 2020, the concept of efficiency describes something that works in an organized and systematic way:

“Efficient policy of human resource management. Launching the monitoring and evaluation system to systematically improve the education system.” (EDS 2020, 2)

Human resource management was linked to the concept of efficiency as well as to the monitoring and evaluation system. Monitoring and evaluation allow better human resources management. In the interviews, an example of the combination of the efficient policy of human resource management and the monitoring and evaluation system were introduced. The rector of the public university presented their quality control system, in which video cameras were installed primarily to ensure the quality of teaching. In that interview, technical solutions such as video cameras were introduced as useful tools to raise the level of quality in teaching. To ensure the quality of teaching at the university, video cameras can be useful, the principal of the public university says:

“We also have video cameras everywhere. This may be strange in Europe, but we use it as a tool here for attendance and for the quality of teaching. If a person knows that someone is watching, that person will probably prepare better for the lesson.” (B.1, No 5)

Second, in EDS 2020 the concept of efficiency describes someone that has acquired the competencies to serve the country productively:

“...the main criterion of the education system’s efficiency will be a graduate who is capable of adequate reaction to challenges s/he encounters and competent enough in compliance with relevant economic, socio-cultural and political needs of the country.” (EDS 2020, 10)

The purpose of Soviet education was to train a citizen who was an active builder of a communist society. To serve the state and the communist system was the first purpose of education and training in the Soviet era. Since independence, this idea has been replaced by the idea of efficiency, which comes from outside the antecedent system, from the language of global education.

Does the borrowing of travelling reforms explain about the influence of global governance in Kyrgyzstan or more about the specific circumstances in Kyrgyzstan? The higher education system in Kyrgyzstan is increasingly subject to both formal and informal regulations from national and global sources. Examining the dynamics of the doxa in Kyrgyzstan’s higher education, the dynamics of national and global sources unfold. Although Kyrgyzstan is

borrowing concepts from travelling reforms for use in its national educational programs and development strategy, these borrowed concepts are modified to suit the local circumstances.

Lawn and Segerholm (2011, 36) argue that the technologies of governance are not only shaping the system, but also replacing it. The new form of education language is being welcomed to replace the Soviet era education terminology. In the doxa of higher education in Kyrgyzstan there was no need to use the Soviet concepts of education. In the Soviet model, education was considered by the state to be the prime agency for accomplishing the state's goals in the planned Soviet economy. Since independence, new governing purposes, ideas and practices of higher education replaced Soviet thinking, including quality assurance and evaluation systems operating as technologies of governance with the terminology of the market economy. These new definitions, concepts and categories not only excluded past categories, but also moved towards a global classification that enables better international cooperation. Furthermore, accepting these concepts into the Education Development Strategy, it illustrates the power of the technologies and agreements relating to the global governance of education.

### **5.1.3 Importance of the Local Peculiarities**

Actors at the universities justified using harsh regulation of the teachers' work because of local features. Technological solutions are essential techniques for controlling the teachers. One of the representatives from a public university introduced their Quality assurance and evaluation system as a control system of the performativity of the teachers:

“We also use an automated system here. All educational documentation is kept online. Every student and every teacher have a login name and can access programs, reports, syllabi and all other relevant documents through their profile. We needed a separate server for this, and Tempus helped us with purchasing this server. We have WiFi here. Now not only students, but parents have access to this information and can control attendance and grades of their children. We also have video camera everywhere. This may be strange in Europe, but we use it as a tool here for attendance and for the quality of teaching. If a person knows that someone is watching, that person will probably better prepare for the lesson.” (B.2, No 5)

There was no debate about the QAE that could be interpreted as being inimical to the professionalism of teachers' work as minimizing their autonomy and trust in the system. Actors at the universities were aware of the domesticated practices

at the QAE system and understood that usage of the technologies to control professionals is not an openly stated truth in Europe. Harsh quality assurance and control mechanisms were justified with cultural explanations – Kyrgyz mentality. Through such initiatives, the ‘local’ is itself reconstituted at the center of the reform. Need for strong quality control mechanisms were explained as being essential to secure the quality of the higher education system.

“Given the Kyrgyz mentality, we need evaluation here. To understand quality, adjust it to the demands. I mean the internal control system here. This is something we are doing to ensure the quality.” (C, B.1, No 1)

Thus, the concept of the Kyrgyz mentality was used to legitimize educational practices, which are very different from European or international practices. Private university lecturers from management studies explained how professors in Europe are no longer priests and prophets but more trainers, whose role is to create the conditions favorable to learning, while students are independent information seekers. In Kyrgyzstan, that kind of professor–student relations would not work, the lecturer argues. He talks about Kyrgyz mentality, referring to methods used where the tendency is more towards top-down guided practices. In his teaching, he gives students a broad foundation in topics relating to business, finance, economics and marketing. Even he is teaching the theory which goes into informing policies and best practice in management; he is giving students tools so they can apply these theories in practice. He explains that, because of the Kyrgyz mentality, he invites students to take advantage of the ‘hard’ manage tools, which are based on top-down instructions.

Various evaluation and quality programs modify power relationships in Kyrgyzstan. Even the ideological premises of quality assurance policy in Kyrgyzstan have been linked to national needs – like the steering of the teacher performance – the mechanisms of quality assurance procedures are imported from supranational practices and programs.

By connecting global educational phenomena with national characteristics, actors are giving local meanings to education policy that has transnational origins. At the same time, the interviewees are positioning themselves in relation to the interviewer, a European researcher. The concept of Kyrgyz mentality is used to make differences between ‘us’ and ‘them’, ‘national’ and ‘global’ as well as ‘cultural’ and ‘political’. The use of the words ‘Kyrgyz mentality’ varies from one case to another.

Adopting the global standards and policy models, Kyrgyzstan is not only changing the governance models of education but also believing that these models are good for its education development. Transnational organizations and donors are not only taking over the education system by implementing travelling reforms, but local actors are also convinced that this global policy model can solve local

problems. In the discourse of the QAE practices of higher education, the need for these models is linked to control. QAE reform is tempting for local actors as it provides tools to improve the steering mechanisms over the education system. For many public universities, the quality assurance system is linked with making university procedures as transparent as possible rather than evaluating the students' learning process. There are also exceptions, as one university staff member from a private university pointed out:

“For many universities in the country, quality assurance is a battle against corruption. For our university, it is different.” (B.2, No 10)

Despite reforms and common language for debating about planned reforms, practices are more difficult to change. Parents do not even think about doing anything wrong when they are paying bribes during the admission process:

“Generally speaking, as mass media and stats show, education is first in terms of corruption, followed by healthcare and law enforcement. But sometimes corruption is spread by parents who want all their children to receive higher education. Even though perhaps now all kids have the capacity to attend a higher education institution, parent want them all to go to university and may offer some money that the administration may accept.” (C–B.2, No 15)

The problem is not only to join the fight against corruption, but also to understand the mentality behind corrupt activities. For example, one principal pointed out how corruption is an issue in higher education, but there are ways to reduce corruption in the education sector. The biggest challenges from her point of view were students whose main interests were to receive the diploma. Respondent argues that students were not interested in gaining more knowledge, but just getting the diploma. This is a common habit in the whole of society and even employers have adapted to the situation:

“There are some mechanisms to fight corruption, cameras, etc. But the perception of the students themselves is a problem, they want just a diploma, not the knowledge and employers adapt to this... But students are contributing, and this is a two-sided issue. Some people just want a diploma. Some students just buy a fake diploma” (C–B.2, No 15)



### **5.1.4 Connecting the Labor Market and Higher Education**

The theme of the labor market was linked to the discourse on quality. Even though the labor market and higher education connection is visible in the education strategy, the conditions in society are not supporting what is stated in the strategy. Education plays a central role in preparing individuals to enter the labor force, as well as equipping them with the skills to engage in lifelong learning experiences. In the Education Development Strategy 2011–2020 of the Kyrgyz Republic, it is stated that:

“the educational system of the year 2020 will produce graduates of the educational system that are equipped both with general as well as specialized knowledge and skills that enable them to be successful in life as well as on the labor market.”

Education is a lifelong process and therefore governments provide opportunities for continuous education from one level to another and continuing after formal education. The graduates are equipped with relevant knowledge and skills to compete on the labor market. (EDS 2011–2020, 4–5). However, there are numerous dimensions of education– labor market linkages that are affecting the overall situation on Kyrgyz society. Rapid expansion of education has not necessarily been accompanied by rapid economic growth and development in the labor market sector. Globally, both general and core competencies and skills have become increasingly valued in labor markets that are characterized by change and in which there is a constant need to adapt to new developments in technology and working methods.

In Kyrgyzstan, the linkage between the labor market and education is not fully balanced. Education should play a central role in preparing individuals to enter the labor force and in equipping them with the skills needed to engage in lifelong learning experiences. However, formal schooling systems in developing economies such in Kyrgyzstan may not be the only important channel for acquiring employment skills. Education and relevant skills do not automatically lead to good labor market outcomes for individuals, if the society does not have favorable labor market conditions for graduates. Another major issue is the gap between the demands of the labor market and the structure of the higher education programs. As a result, there is an oversupply of graduates or specialists in certain fields, while other fields suffer from a shortage of experts. In the Education Development Strategy for 2011–2020 it is stated that one of the main issues within the framework of modernization of the content of higher education is:

“The gap between demand in the labor market and the structure of programs of higher education generates an excess of graduates or specialists in one area and a shortage in the others.” (EDS 2020, 25)

In the labor market debate, a general understanding was that the labor market in Kyrgyzstan is not systematically developed and the connection between higher education and the labor market is not sufficient. Skills and competencies that students acquire at university are not related to the future competencies needed in the labor market.

In Kyrgyz higher education, there was a shared understanding between a range of actors that the quality of higher education is closely linked with the needs of society. In the quality discourse, the higher education employers, stakeholders and society are key players and be taken into account in the process of pursuing quality. Listening to society is crucial for achieving better quality in higher education.

” Quality is compliance with expectations of the society and the labor market. If our education is only focused on knowledge but not on competencies, that are a must for a specialist, there is something missing. Thus, we need to listen to the society to the employers and produce the graduates that will be in demand.” (B.1, No 5)

Understanding the quality as a competency needed in a future working life is different compared to the Soviet education system where education is aimed at a single workplace. The problem with defining quality in higher education in conjunction with labor market needs is not unproblematic in Kyrgyzstan because of the Soviet history of understanding work conditions and also because of the lack of employment. In discussions, questions raised about: who is the judge of quality and the value of education, if the labor market is located in another country? It is estimated that one million people are currently working abroad of whom 92 percent work in Russia and the majority of the rest are in Kazakhstan (ILO Kyrgyzstan). This represents one-fifth of the country’s total population. Many of the labor migrants abroad find themselves in irregular conditions. In the interviews, the issue of migration also appears. The complexity of the labor market was highlighted in the discussion about the labor market:

“We recently had discussions on this notion and at the moment, we understand quality as something that complies with the demands of various stakeholders. It is important to define the stakeholders. It is the students and the employers. But who are the employers? We have a large migration issue, so we need to focus on the Russian and Kazakh employers and their demands as well. Our main labor markets are in Russia and Kazakhstan. We need to focus on their demands in employment.” (C–B.2, No 13)

The debate about the labor market connection and higher education is complicated. As one of the respondents from a private university said, in order to improve the conditions of labor market for the students, the demands of the Russian and Kazakh employers should be taken seriously.

### **5.1.5 Implementation of the Quality Control System**

In the discourse of the quality, the quality assurance and evaluation practices were discussed. Unquestionably, the higher education landscape in Kyrgyzstan has been reshaped by introduction of the quality assurance and evaluation (QAU) practices in education. The concepts of indicators and benchmarks received attention from the policymakers of Kyrgyzstan, at the same time when travelling reforms were introduced. As written in an earlier sections discourses of creating, regulating and governing or, in other words, monitoring the higher education of Kyrgyzstan has been discussed. Whether it should be based on measurable indicators – ‘governing by numbers’ (e.g. Rose 1991) – is debated in the field of higher education.

In the policy debate, those scholars promoting the establishment of the National Testing Center argued that the institutionally based admission practices allow for corrupt, non-transparent and discriminatory practices to penetrate to distribution of government scholarships. With quality assurance and evaluation reforms, corrupt practices are able to be solve. (DeYoung 2011 & Heyneman 2008.) In the interviews when the usefulness of that travelling reform was justified by policy makers, the NST was tamed to a local problem, corruption.

Now, the problematic question is no longer whether quality assurance practices are needed in Kyrgyzstan, but how they should be implemented. For respondents the need for a quality assurance system is not questioned, even if justifications differ depending on whom the importance of the reforms is justified. Countries’ practices in educational evaluation range from inspection to QAE systems and comparative exchanges of information. The importance of the QAE system was not questioned in the field of higher education in Kyrgyzstan.

In the quality discourse, actors from the field of higher education argued that the evaluation system is needed to control the disorder of the higher education system. The centrality of skills, competencies and standards in QAE work has emerged in tandem with economic and society changes in Kyrgyzstan. In the Soviet education system, there was no systematic quality assurance system. In the interviews, the quality assurance system was understood as standards and frameworks for the quality of higher education:

“In the past, there was no quality evaluation in Kyrgyzstan as we understand it now, which led to some chaos. As soon as we started developing frameworks and standards for understanding quality, some

understanding in the academic society emerged, of what it is, what it should be like, and how it should be assessed, and this led to some results.” (A, No 16)

From the point of view of the governance of Kyrgyz higher education, the Education Development Strategy 2020 defined the role of the QAE to be central. In EDS 2020 the concept of monitoring was used to illustrate the QAE system and its current weaknesses. The goal was to increase the responsibility of managers and practitioners in the outcomes of their action. EDS 2020 explains the potentiality of the QAE system to produce data for better guiding monitoring and controlling of the system:

“The current monitoring and evaluation are restricted to overseeing the proper implementation of decrees and regulations. There is little monitoring and evaluation of the quality of education. The current system is also not inductive to making mid-level managers and practitioners feel responsible for the outcomes of their actions.”

While the official education documents from the government highlighted the importance of the regulations behind the QAE practices, at the universities the QAE was seen as an opportunity to increase control over the teachers. Increasing the external control of teachers was described as a new opportunity that quality assurance mechanisms are bringing. The interviewees argued how without quality evaluation, it is impossible to control the whole education system and especially the teachers’ work:

“Should quality be assessed? Why and how? There must be some metrics for this. If you can’t measure, you can’t control. How do we do it? We look at the results of exams. If a lot of students are failing the course, there might be a problem with the teacher...” (B.2, No 2)

Conventional thinking about the QAE system supported the controlling effect of the system. The use of measurable indicators and standards resonate with the local understanding of control – evidence-based practices increase the reliability of the education system.

‘Achieving high quality’ is highly politicized in the discourse on quality as the achievement of the quality presupposes policy measures which are not self-evidently acceptable. Conceptualization and contextualization of the quality of higher education in the official education policy documents by the government of Kyrgyzstan follow-up the purposes of the Bologna process and other international recommendations. When the official education policy documents represent operationalizations of higher education quality assurance systems – lack of

uniform criteria and standards, they do not define how these problems should be solved, only what should be done. In the official education policy documents, the lack of the quality assurance and evaluation system is a problem in itself:

“Inefficient system of quality assurance. Two of the existing quality assurance mechanisms - licensing and certification - do not bring much effect because of the fact that they are not used as tools to monitor quality and improvement. There are no appropriate criteria or standards for evaluation of higher education institutions from the perspective of an independent accreditation institute.” (EDS 2020, 25).

Consequently, I assume that the current political and national needs of the higher education are linked to the purposes of the quality assurance and evaluations to increase credibility in implementing international education reforms. For example, the ‘low quality’ of the professionals at the universities and inadequate training for personal staff are presented as the weaknesses of the higher education system (EDS 2020, 25). However, the Education Development Strategy 2020 is only naming those problems, not describing how to solve them. The discourse on quality assurance and evaluation focuses on justifying the need for the monitoring and evaluation system.

The Berlin Communiqué (2003) sets out the agenda for the roles of individual institutions and national states in relation to the quality assurance and evaluation:

“Ministers emphasize the importance of all elements of the Bologna Process for establishing the European Higher Education Area and stress the need to intensify the efforts at institutional, national and European levels.”

The self-regulative element of higher education quality control becomes visible in the Education Development Strategy 2020 of Kyrgyzstan. The absence of the quality assurance and monitoring system is not the only dilemma of the nation state, but also the responsibility of the higher education institutions. The pressing need for the establishment of ‘quality control departments’ in all higher education institutions is emphasized in the EDS 2020. Following this logic, the basic national need for establishment of quality control departments at the university level is to create a professional quality assurance system. According to the Berlin Communiqué, the quality assurance system must be developed at local, national and European levels. The criteria and methods must be shared. These elements are written down in the Education Development Strategy. One of the reasons for this is that the ideological and methodological orientation of the quality assurance and evaluation have been adopted from the European principles.

## **5.2 Discourse on Modernization**

The question of modernization has fostered the development of the higher education sector in Kyrgyzstan. The discourse on modernization is loaded with many expectations. After independence, reunderstanding of modernization started to dominate discussions about higher education. As written in Chapter 4, after independence, the debate about education policy was dominated by a desire to change the direction of the education policy. The need for modernization was linked to this discussion. The empirical finding of this study shows that after three decades, the discourse on modernization is still topical. In the current debate, the discourse on modernization was linked to the development, progress and ‘west-mindedness’ of higher education.

The action of independent accreditation is related to the discourse on modernization. The roots of independent accreditation reform can be traced back to the years at the beginning of independence. In the discourse on modernization, the changes in higher education, allowing the entrance of private operators and international actors, and continuing stress on the enlargement of the higher education sector are considered to be examples that led to the fragmentation of the higher education system. Eventhought, the Law on independent accreditation is part of the reform package related to the quality reforms, but the finding of this study demonstrates that the discourse of the independent accreditation was linked to the discourses of modernization. In Kyrgyzstan, immediately after independence, the education sector was opened up for private operators and for international actors. New higher education institutions were set up quickly. The aim of education policy was to expand the higher education available to as many people as possible. This led to a situation in which the reforms of independent accreditation appeared as a savior in the discourse on modernization. At the same time, the discourse on modernization was associated with arguments related to development and progress, but on the other hand, actors were concerned about the divergence of the higher education system. In the discourse on modernization, elements of legal frameworks and independent accreditation were discussed. Also, different local functions of higher education and creating the higher education system were discussed as part of the discourse on modernization.

### **5.2.1 Creating the Modern Higher Education System**

The modernization became a keyword of higher education policies of Kyrgyzstan since the independence. In the first Kyrgyz national education strategy, the Education Development Strategy for the Kyrgyz Republic 2007–2010 the new education system is called a ‘modern education system’, in contrast to the Soviet education system. EDS 2010 presents five objectives of the modern education system:

1. Ensuring equal access to education,
2. Updating teaching content and teaching technology,
3. Improving quality,
4. Using resources more efficiently, and
5. Developing democratic governance.

In the Education Development Strategy 2020 the concept of a modern education system is operationalized under five different aspects. Furthermore, the categories of the modern education system could be explained by universal models of education, state and society rather than by distinctive national features of education. The first category, the equal access to education objective is to demonstrate the existence of human values, equality of rights and equal conditions for women and men. The influence of Universal Declaration of Human Rights ‘Everyone has the right to education’ (Article 26.) appears in this first category. The second category, updating teaching content and teaching technology is a broad prescription rather than the simple objective to overcome tangible problems. The third category, improving quality is tied to the international recommendations and universal models of education. Education is central to the modernizing mission of the state, and the structure of education and education reforms are closely linked to the rise of standardized models of education. Those standardized models are justified by using arguments related to the quality of education. The fourth category, using resources more efficiently implies economic forces operating and reconstructing the structure of the education system. The fifth category, developing democratic governance directly responds to the change of the system – from the Soviet Union to a democratic independent country.

The pressure of international harmonization of the higher education system of Kyrgyzstan becomes an objective of the Education Development Strategy. The stress on ‘ensuring equal access to education’, ‘improving quality’ and ‘developing democratic governance’ are examples of the ways in which international harmonization takes place. While those objectives of the modern educational system are influenced by the international factors, the local factors are presented as an obstacle for the modern education system. Those local features are linked to the poverty, child labor, shortage of teachers and financing the education system. In the Education Development Strategy, the concept of the modern education system does not refer to solving those problems.

Instead, the concept of modern has a role to legitimate desired reforms. While referring to the modern education system actors or policy programs adds meanings to education reforms by promoting the change. Implicitly the use of the concept involves the idea of progress. For example, in the Education Development Strategy 2020, it is argued that the modern education system needs to be flexible and resilient. The modern education system must be able to change for the need of the society as is written at the general principle of the EDS 2020:

“From maximum control with minimal accountability to minimal regulation with high accountability: a modern educational system can be described as a system with maximum control and poor accountability. The EDS 2020 introduces a different approach – minimal regulations of the process, strict monitoring and evaluation of the result.” (EDS 2020, 4).

In the discourse on modernization, the education system should be based on accountability rather than control. Strict monitoring and valuation system is described as a modern education system.

### **5.2.2 Reforms of the Legal Frameworks**

Following its independence from the Soviet Union on 1991, Kyrgyzstan has gone through the process of change in all areas of social, economic and political life. Higher education reform has been central to this agenda since independence. The Soviet era system of state-funded and Communist Party-controlled system of higher education has been transformed into a marketized, privatized, internationalized, provider of diverse higher education services. Development of the higher education started right after the independence from the Soviet Union. The first reformatations related to the legal and political frameworks of the higher education. These included changes of legal regulations (Law on Education in 1992) for the licensing of institutions, governance of higher education institutions and financing the system. The first legal, financial and ideological frameworks for higher education created conditions for a rapid diversification and expansion of the system. These changes formed the basis of the higher education system that Kyrgyzstan has today, although other changes have been made afterwards. Legal, financial and ideological reforms were crucial for remodeling the official understanding of the higher education system. Rapid growth of the higher education system and the consequent decrease in public spending on higher education since independence has been systematically to challenge the doxa of higher education of Kyrgyzstan.

Kyrgyz higher education is based on the principles proclaimed in the Law on Education, which was adopted on 1992 and amended in 2003. Education in Kyrgyzstan is organized in a comprehensive system of upbringing and training established in the interest of the individual, the society and the state of Kyrgyzstan in order to assure the moral, intellectual and physical health of the nation. Article 2 of the Law on Education stipulates that all citizens have the right to education regardless of sex, nationality, language, social status, political or religious belief:

“Citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic have the right to education regardless of gender, nationality, language, social and



property status, type and nature of employment, religion, political and religious beliefs, place of residence and other circumstances.” (Law on Education, Article 2)

At the legislative level, Kyrgyzstan has been adopting formal regulations to support reforms related to the democratization of the education system, humanistic values as well as Bologna Process principles. For example, Kyrgyzstan is not a signatory to the Bologna Process, but it has been adopting Bologna Process reforms for several years. In accordance with Governmental Resolution No 496 of August 23, 2011 “On establishing a two-level structure of the higher professional education in the Kyrgyz Republic”, Kyrgyzstan switched from Soviet era degrees to bachelor’s and master’s degrees. A two-level structure of higher professional education was set for the 2012–2013 academic year. In the legislation, the influence of global governance is visible and potential obstacles to the implementation of international reforms have been removed. Many variations are possible in the pathways from formal regulations to implementation. In the interviews, concerns related to the implementation of reforms were expressed. At the practical level, educators are still using materials and teaching guidance, as one of the interviewees says:

“Reforms require a legislative foundation and a political will. When it comes to legislation it is the Ministry and Parliament. When it comes to political will, it was difficult to implement the reforms. And I think it is not finished yet. We have BA and MA now, but the system is not fully functional. The educators still count the hours as in the Soviet system. The material and technical base is also far behind the required levels.” (B.1, No 6)

Transition from the legislative level to the practical level has not been fully completed. Kyrgyzstan’s higher education system is relatively young and still changing. It combines the features of the Soviet higher education system, international recommendations and market economy principles. The higher education of Kyrgyzstan is multilayered, as simultaneously it has elements from both official and practical circumstances.

The Law on Education made possible the opening of fee-paying slots at public universities and introducing market economy principles. It also opened the opportunity for new study programs and subjects that were prohibited or irrelevant during the Soviet time, for example studies in economics and management. Based on the Law on Education, higher education institutions can independently develop their curricula in accordance with the recommendations of the State Education Standards (SES). According to the interviewee, curriculum change was one of the

reforms after independence, and another was commercialization and the most important one was the increase in the size of the higher education sector:

“The number of universities dramatically increased since independence, which also had an impact on quality. Another important reform is that curriculums have changed. Some new subject areas were introduced; subjects that were prohibited during the Soviet time, or were irrelevant - management, science, some others. The third aspect is commercialization of the education sector.” (B.2, No 8)

Commercialization and the increase in the number of higher education institutions happened simultaneously. In accordance with Article 43 of the Law on Education, sources of funding for higher education can be from national and local budgets (for public educational organizations) as well as funds from foreign states, funds of education institutions, state grants provided to students, funds from physical and legal entities, education institutions' own funds and other sources that do not contradict the legislation of the Kyrgyz Republic. (Law on Education, Article 43).

The financing of private higher education institutions is independent of the state. The main source of the funding of higher education institutions consists of tuition fees. All students in private higher education are expected to pay tuition fees, which are the main source of income for private higher education institutions. Tuition fees per academic year (60 ECTS credits) range from 350 to 5 250 euros for bachelor's programs and up to 9 100 euros for master's programs (Chokusheva & Sirmbard 2017). In public higher education institutions, students' study either on a grant or on a contract basis. In the academic year 2014–2015 almost twenty-five percent of the students enroll in the higher education on a scholarship on the basis of the national entrance exam (Chokusheva & Simbard 2017).

Higher education reforms are a strategic priority for any state. These reforms focus on both the current and the future needs of society. Kyrgyzstan has experienced significant changes in the field of higher education that have affected the philosophy of education, its global goals and objectives, organizational structure, content of education, monitoring of educational activities, forms and methods of education quality assurance, approaches to the development of educational standards and curriculum and many other aspects. Policy-based interventions usually tend to focus on the outcomes of the reforms and bring new ideas to the education sector. These changes also influence the formation of education at an ideological level and they are challenging the doxa of higher education in Kyrgyzstan.

On 23 March 2012, the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic by Decree No 201 'On Strategic Directions of the Education System Development in the Kyrgyz Republic' has adopted the Education Development Concept in the Kyrgyz

Republic until 2020. These documents shape the ideology of education policy goals and principles, values and priorities of the higher education. Lifelong Learning principles are an important element of the Education Development Concept and Strategy until 2020. The declared purpose of education is to support the growth of citizens as independent thinkers. The main purpose of the education is to develop the ability of learners based on their individual educational trajectories and to teach them the skills needed for the future labor market and society. Implementation of the Education Development Strategy until 2020 will ensure that the educational system prepares citizens who will:

- “have strong communication skills;
- be able to act independently, openly express their views; use creative and innovative approaches;
- share values of human rights and freedom, gender equality, respect cultural, ethnic and political diversity;
- handle general and specialized knowledge and skills that will allow them to be successful in life and labor market.
- The educational system in 2020 will be the main tool for promoting Kyrgyzstan’s social and political development and will ensure its competitiveness in regional and international processes.” (EDS 2020)

Since the beginning of the 1970s, international organizations such as UNESCO and the OECD with other institutions in the European Union have been the main proponents of the point of view that “learning is a lifelong process and that all education should be organized around that principle” (Schuetze, 2006). With regard to scope, some policy documents follow a holistic, integrated approach that sees lifelong learning as a truly transversal concept, while others reflect a sectoral perspective that defines lifelong learning as a separate, complementary unit within an education system (UNESCO, 2016). One of the objectives of the EDS 2020 is “Creating conditions for continuous lifelong learning” (EDS 2020, 3–4). In the Education Development Strategy 2020 it is stated that by 2020, the financing will be stable and human resources will be adequate; by 2020 the implementation of the EDS will “enabling lifelong learning” and “development of social partnership at all education levels and involvement of community and employers into proactive participation in education process” (EDS 2020, 36).

Second, as stated in EDS 2020, education is crucial for the development of the political and social aspects of the society of Kyrgyzstan. Also, the competitiveness both in regional and international processes are important. The direction in which education is being developed are ideological choices. The above examples assume a view of higher education of Kyrgyzstan that is open to international influences and on which system change is possible.

### **5.2.3 Different Aspirations Towards Independent Accreditation Reform**

In 2016, the law of independent accreditation was approved in Kyrgyzstan. The research material was collected shortly before the law came into force. The reform of independent accreditation was widely discussed during the interviews. University representatives in Bishkek explained the current reforms of independent accreditation as the way to shut down the poorly performing universities and reduce the number of universities. For actors coming from the universities with strong cultural and social capital, the independent accreditation reform was very welcomed and there were many positive aspirations for this reform. The new law of independent accreditation allows higher education institutions to be accredited by an independent accrediting agency, instead of being accredited by the Ministry of Education. However, the law on independent accreditation was loaded with the strong beliefs of the actors who were able to benefit from the new law.

In the discussion of independent accreditation, an idea of excellence was related to the reform of independent accreditation. In that discourse, the aim of higher education is to provide the highest possible level of education to individuals and to meet national needs. One representative from an educational organization believed that the new reform of independent accreditation would increase the quality of education to the best possible level:

“Independent accreditation is our biggest hope. Through it we hope to pull up the quality of education. We will not be at the level of Oxford, but at least we can improve what we have to an acceptable level.” (A, No 16)

The independent accreditation reform challenged the current understanding of the structure and function of higher education. The consequences of the reforms include producing system-level competition between the institutions, supporting elitist institutions and producing highly valued positional goods for certain institutions. This discourse is promoted by adding ideas of world-class universities. Justifying the reform by referring to the famous Oxford university gives an idea that this reform was seeking to do something extraordinarily fine and is in line with international standards.

University representation outside of the capital was more concerned with the effects that it might cause for young people who are outside the universities and the labor market. The aim of the reform of independent accreditation was understood as the way to improve the quality in higher education. When interviews were conducted six months before the Law on independent

accreditation came into force, there were not yet any independent accreditation agencies. In the discourse on independent accreditation, there was a strong will to improve the quality of higher education through independent accreditation. In that discourse, the reform of independent accreditation represents international standards, which is also inevitable for Kyrgyzstan.

However, exceptional hurry, shortage of vision and the lack of systematic planning watered down that the greatest enthusiasm for this reform. The former Minister of Education described how urgent the implementation of the reform was, but the process completely ignored the mapping of the situation. At the beginning, the law on independent accreditation was planned for full implementation in 2014. First, the law first came into force and after that it was noticed that the Ministry of Education lacked the capacity to implement the measures required by the law. Thereafter, it was necessary to make changes to the law to allow the system to work. The former policy maker explained that the law on independent accreditation started to move forward with great enthusiasm, but that there was almost in a situation in which almost 30 percent of universities would not have had a valid license:

“There is also a new law that came into power as of September 1, 2014. Now all the universities have to go through an independent accreditation. Giving the Ministry of Education no leverage to control the process. As usual, many things are not well thought out. Although the law has passed. The bills and regulations on how a private agency should be established, who gives them power, license this is not accounted. The whole process was in the limbo until December. As there was no agency that could carry out accreditation and the Ministry did not have the right to accredit. So, the universities with an expired accreditation did not know what to do. They basically did not have the right to issue diplomas. At that time, [The deputy Minister] had to initiate the amendments to the Law, to stop it from coming into force until 2016, to give the independent agencies time to establish themselves. And until then the Ministry will still have the right to accredit. Because otherwise in the summer there would be 16 universities without the right to issue diplomas.” (B.2, No 18)

Even though there was criticism of the implementation of the independent accreditation, the form itself was not questioned. Transition to independent accreditation was seen as part of the international standards with which Kyrgyz higher education would improve. Due to the independent accreditation reform, the power of the Ministry in the higher education sector would decrease and the independent agencies would give licensees for accreditation. During the Soviet era, all the power was subordinated to the Ministry of Education.

The need for distributing the power from the Ministry of Education was further supported by the actors from the universities. Not only was it presupposed that a modern society has flexible power structures, it was also presumed that these would create the condition in which universities would have more autonomy and opportunities to influence. Actors from the universities argued that the reform of Independent Accreditation would further lead to the transition to the system, that already started with the Bologna Process transformation, in which power would be di-vided between the actors:

“Now, when we joined the Bologna Process, the system has become more flexible. Our Minister of Education used to control the entire education system. Now they only accredit diplomas. Independent external actors are going to be responsible for accreditation too.” (B.2, No 2)

In that discourse, the collapse of centralized control is a sign of progress and symbolizes both internationalization and modernity. The Ministry of Education was described as an old-fashioned actor, one which did not represent the renewal power of education.

Consequently, the expansion of the higher education system was used as an explanation for the reform of the independent accreditation. Enlargement of the higher education sector happened right after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Expansion took place with societal needs in the new situation, in which the former social system no longer existed, and one of the aims was to maintain order and peace in society by opening the higher education system up for commercial purposes.

Even if higher education is available to more people, it does not add to the certainty of the future. In Kyrgyzstan, one of the targets in higher education policy has been to keep young people satisfied and to increase number of the years that young people stay at school. Higher education policy has responded to societal needs. As earlier studies have demonstrated, the government wants to keep the burgeoning youth population out of the stagnant labor market and parents are doing the socially accepted thing when they send their children to university. The reform of independent accreditation challenged that understanding of the function of higher education.

#### **5.2.4 Different Local Functions of Higher Education**

The discussion of the function of higher education is closely related to the reform of independent accreditation. In the discourse of the function of higher education, representatives from universities referred to the new accreditation regulations.

The function of higher education is not to support exclusive elite education for national and global competition, rather it is to expand higher education to wider

masses (e.g. Marginson 2006). Activating youth is an argument in support of the expanded higher education sector. Higher education is a way to activate and support youth for the future. A representative from a public university argued how leaving youth without meaningful tasks is too uncertain in Central Asia, where political insecurity is present:

“If young people don’t have anything to do, it is a dangerous situation here in Central Asia, due to the Islamic influence. Thank God we did not have what they had in Tajikistan, with a civil war. Afghanistan is right around the corner. We needed to occupy the young people...” (B.1, No 6)

Political and media discussions are concerned with the view that whatever happens in Afghanistan has an influence across Central Asia. Without overlooking the security situation in the region, using examples of the threat of terrorism, Islamic radicalization or the possible threat of Afghanistan to its own security situation is acceptable in public discussion to get through various initiatives.

The most visible changes since independence has been the expansion of higher education. These days, almost every second secondary school graduate becomes a university student. For different actor groups, it was commonly agreed that the role of the universities should be to keep young people occupied and the reason behind the large higher education sector comes from the poor labor market conditions. Hundreds of thousands of young people can be controlled through education and they can be used for public activities. The discussion about the expansion of higher education rests on two opposite discourses which are shaping the existence of higher education in Kyrgyzstan. The discourse that supports the current system is trying to maintain the current situation. The opposite discourse is challenging and questioning the current higher education system with arguments related to competition and global goals.

While analyzing the statistics and policy documents, it would be possible to argue that the explosion of higher education in Kyrgyzstan is part of the wider global movement after the years of the Soviet Union. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, one of the more dramatic changes in higher education has been lowering barriers to higher education. Opening up higher education to private initiatives and actors has made higher education possible for a larger population. Higher education was very prestigious during the Soviet times and admission to higher education was highly competitive before the 1990s. From that point of view, it is possible to argue that the expansion of the higher education sector was part of the internationalization of higher education that has happened in post-Soviet countries since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Higher education is widely accepted as being a fundamental resource for governments, societies and individuals. In the discussion about the function of

higher education in Kyrgyzstan, education is nowadays perceived not only as a right, but also as a duty. Families are typically willing to make financial sacrifices for their children to gain access to higher education, even though higher education does not guarantee success in the labor market or is economically viable.

One of the discourses to support a larger higher education sector was related to high youth unemployment, a large youth cohort and social insecurity. In the discourse of occupation, enabling higher education to be available to all was justified with arguments about the large numbers of young people without meaningful employment and political insecurity in the region.

In the discussion about the function of higher education, the idea of uncertainty emerges. The new law of independent accreditation started to change the understanding of the current higher education system, in which social stability is an important aspect. The law of independent accreditation brought in the idea of excellence. For actors representing the higher education institutions in the geographic or socio-economic border areas, the law on independent accreditation appears to be an internal threat and justifying their existence with examples of external threat, such as the fear of Afghanistan, became part of the used discourses. Simultaneously, the discourse of occupation maintained the doxic situation in the discursive space of higher education in Kyrgyzstan. Since independence, the discourses of fear have been rhetorical tools used by policy makers and other actors to justify their initiatives.

“First of all, it is the government which enabled the creation of many universities and the commercialization of education. The second group of actors is the Rectors, university management. Young people were largely unemployed in the 1990s, so one of the approaches for occupying them and preventing further instability and conflicts was education. Commercialization also brought a lot of money to the universities and the rectors benefited as well.” (B.2, No 8)

Issues of religious radicalization and violence in the Central Asia region and across the borders of Central Asia influence the discourse of occupation in higher education in Kyrgyzstan. Tensions in the region are influential in the discourses about how higher education policy is justified. Political and regional insecurity in Central Asia and its respective countries are shaping the discourse of the occupation in Kyrgyzstan. Even though there have been several reasons behind the liberalization of higher education, mass higher education has been justified with arguments of insecurity related to the geographical location and political situation. However, the positions of different actors, the status of the higher education institutions and regional differences shapes the discourses of occupation. Especially in southern Kyrgyzstan, events involving ethnic violence between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in 1990 and 2010 are still shaping the political



discourses. In the late 1990s, Kyrgyzstan faced a new threat as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and Islamic radicals and terrorism became part of the discourses of potential threats in Central Asia.

A continuing tension between threat and reassurance is central theme in the discussion of occupation. The discussion of occupation rests on several pillars of insecurity – population growth, unemployment rate, and internal and external threats. The discussion of occupation supports the current system of higher education. undisputed space. The higher education system of Kyrgyzstan is geographically and socio-economically ranked and using the discussion of occupation gives voices to discourses which do not support the limitation of higher education. This discussion supports political decisions that were made immediately after independence when higher education was liberalized. In 2015, when the interviews reported in this dissertation were conducted, there was a hot debate about how the new law of independent accreditation would affect individual universities, which act as educators of all citizens. The fear was that the law would exclude higher education institutions that could not meet the criterion or independent accreditation.

### **5.3 Discourse on Internationalization**

The discourse on internationalization not only describes higher education developments in Kyrgyzstan, but also produces and reproduces views behind the higher education policy. In the discourse on internationalization, two opposing arguments were visible. First, in exploring how actors relate to the internationalization of higher education, I found that their arguments made reference to the national features of Kyrgyzstan. Saying that Kyrgyzstan has always been an innovative and open country. Secondly, the discourse on internationalization was used to demonstrate how Kyrgyzstan is joining the global higher education community. In this manner, adopting travelling reforms and working with international partners also meant accepting the global education ideology, which is based on neoliberal logic. Thus, construction of the discourse on internationalization is a combination of elements from the neoliberal logic and from local circumstances.

The discourse on internationalization includes assumptions of national openness and global partnership. However, actors from the field of higher education are linking the openness to the national characteristics, meaning that the desire for internationalization is not outside the country, but rather it is a national peculiarity of the people. In other words, the discourse on internationalization is utilized to create a national identity emphasizing an element of openness and flexibility. In addition to national openness, the higher education system has been created to be flexible and welcoming to international partnerships.

Being open for innovation and new approaches is not self-evident in Central Asia and this was highlighted in interviews. In the interviews, the actors also highlighted the flexibility of the higher education system, as one of the policymakers said:

“We are open to innovation and new approaches if they are applicable. Our system is open, not only to the EU but to any country. We study the practices of Europe and Asia and apply this knowledge here.” (D, No 14)

In the discourse on internationalization, actors underlined the adoptable elements of higher education system of Kyrgyzstan, and that those were an important factor in the ongoing development of internationalization. In the discourse on internationalization, discourses in addition to the discourse of openness were visible. Those were the discourse of partnership, the discourse of the Bologna Process and the discourse of cooperation with Russia. In the discourse of the Bologna Process, implementation of international reforms was discussed.

### **5.3.1 Open-minded System of Higher Education**

In the Central Asian context, Kyrgyzstan has been openly adopting international reforms and recommendations. Actually, many reforms concerning education would not have taken place without international cooperation and external recommendations. In the discourse on internationalization, Kyrgyz openness to new influences were explained by reference to local and cultural features. In the interviews, the desire of the local citizens to be updated and innovative moved into the internationalization of higher education. It seems that the discourse on internationalization is unpoliticized at the university level to show that the change in the education policy would have not happened without the active role of the citizens. In the interviews, students and citizens were introduced as innovative and learningminded people, which leads to international cooperation in Kyrgyzstan:

“A lot of people are ready to adopt interesting ideas in the Kyrgyzstan I think in comparison with other countries, KR adopts a lot of things. Here every student knows what mobility is and what Erasmus Mundus is, they travel abroad.

Interviewer: Why this is happening in the Kyrgyzstan?

It could be cultural. Like Sponge Bob. You know Sponge Bob? Here people are like a sponge, they absorb everything. Sometimes we organize training for civil servants. Sometimes even people age 70 come to learn something. People are open. Maybe they also like to study, they have motivation. I have a lot of students who ask me about mobility in Europe.” (B.1, No 11)

In the Central Asian context, highlighting the activity of citizens and local values can be interpreted in two ways. In the first instance, connecting the local people's openness with internationalization and mobility reflects the idea that individuals are the ones who benefit and utilize the internationalization of higher education. At the same time, it reflects the openness of Kyrgyz society in relation to other Central Asian societies. Kyrgyzstan is the only Central Asian country which has shifted to democratic governance.

Until the late 1980s, decisions made by the Ministry of Education in Moscow were similar across 15 Soviet republics. A Law 'On Education' in 1992 reoriented the political-economic context of Kyrgyzstan. This was followed by a series of new laws and strategies which aimed to transform the education system.

The academic mobility of students in Kyrgyzstan has been implemented as a part of intergovernmental and interinstitutional agreements and part of the internationalization of the higher education of Kyrgyzstan. Education Development Program 2020 highlights the role of the internationalization of education in supporting the development of Kyrgyzstan's areas of economic growth and the quality of higher education. Internationalization is also strongly linked to the Bologna Process and the transition to the education credit system, which provides flexibility and mobility for students (EDS 2020, 4).

For over 20 years, students and staff from Kyrgyzstan have moved to European universities in the Erasmus program. Kyrgyzstan has participated in the Tempus Programme since 1995. Since 2015, Erasmus+ has also allowed short-term mobility to Europe from other parts of the world for students, researchers, and staff. In the official education programs offered by the government of Kyrgyzstan, the Bologna Process represents international education standards and requirements. The mobility programs have been specifically launched to foster internationalization rather than internal mobility between higher education institutions inside the country. The mobility programs have provided opportunities for students to study at foreign universities, but many students face difficulties in finding work positions apply their new skills upon their return.

It is quite natural that in the Kyrgyz context, many students hope that an international experience would be an entry ticket for a career back in their home country, but this is not automatically the case. For representatives from the universities it was tempting to define the Bologna Process and its mobility program from the point of view governmental control of the education system:

"So, this is the case. They do not understand what you refer to the Ministry of Education, and the fact that the Bologna process is more than just a control. Its purpose was to promote academic progress. However, academic mobility is absurd for Kyrgyzstan. No one from Bishkek goes to study in Talas." (B.2, 18)

Internationalization of higher education is built on the presuppositions in some of the documents analyzed. These presuppositions mirror the belief that internationalization should be accepted as a value of the academic community, students and other stakeholders. Internationalization is asserted neutrally, without questioning the need for, or the purpose of, the internationalization.

In the official education policy documents of the government of Kyrgyzstan, the role of education has an important function in the formation of the competitiveness of Kyrgyzstan in local and global arenas: “The educational system in 2020 will be the main tool for promoting Kyrgyzstan’s social and political development and will ensure its competitiveness in regional and international processes.” (EDS 2020, 3).

In the discussion of cultural issues, international practices were linked in with the local culture and customs. Anyhow, simultaneously, global educational qualifications were questioned. Combining educational reforms with local features is part of the domestication of educational reform, in which global educational premises are provided with local meanings. The Law on Education stipulates that educational policy in Kyrgyzstan should be based on the principles of:

“the priority of universal human values combined with nation-al cultural heritage, upbringing in terms of citizenship, hard work, patriotism and respect for human rights and liberties” (Law on Education 2003).

Despite suppression of Soviet-nationalistic activity, many aspects of the Kyrgyz national culture were retained during the Soviet era. In the discourse on internationalization two sides were visible: on one side, the necessity of the whole process was questioned, and on the other side, the need for internationalization was justified. In the debate against internationalization, it was stated that national peculiarities would drive past international educational goals. This discourse was combined with a conservative notion that new global education reforms were incompatible with local culture and history. In the research data, the concept of the Kyrgyz mentality, the history of the country and local values were used when respondents justified undesirable educational traditions or habits.

Interviews underlined the link between higher education and the social status of the family. Interviews showed how a certain amount of social capital was required in Kyrgyzstan, without which it would be impossible to gain social appreciation:

“There is one peculiarity of our mentality. Our people think that you can only be successful if you receive higher education. In Europe or in Russia, people can choose a different profession and succeed without

necessarily going to a university. Here it would be shameful if your children don't attend a university. Sometimes people invest the last things they have, selling cattle and so on. This is not always worth the investment. But bottom line is that the demand for education is present and will be present for years to come.” (A, No 16)

The conceptions and framings of internationalization promoted in Kyrgyzstan are connected to their beliefs and values. Despite the interviewees' frustration in practical implementation in the higher education sector, not a single participant suggested that these patriarchal social norms and family traditions should be defied or altered. No one shared a story of breaking with social norms, and the opportunity to challenge traditions was not even suggested. Education is not only the right of the individual, but the liability of the whole family.

### **5.3.2 Principles of the Bologna Process Behind the Higher Education Policy**

The governance of the European education space appears to be increasingly produced through building relations between actors in the networks and communities as well as introducing instrument to harmonize different higher education systems. The Bologna Process began in Europe but also spread to other parts of the globe. For example, Kyrgyzstan is not a member of the Bologna Process, but it has been adopting the principles of the Bologna reforms. In accordance with Governmental Resolution of the Kyrgyz Republic No 496 of August 2011, 'On establishing a two-level structure of the higher professional education in the Kyrgyz Republic', a two-level structure of higher education was set for the 2012–2013 academic year. In the same year, 2012 saw the introduction of a credit system equivalent to ECTS.

The use of concepts and different expressions is important in the formulation of educational policy programs. The document entitled “Opening the EU-funded Erasmus + Programme for Central Asia”, published by the European Commission in 2016, describes how the aim of the cooperation between the EU and Central Asia is to modernize the education systems in partner countries. Thus, as discussed earlier (see Chapter 6.1.1), the dialogue between the EU and Central Asia is based on the idea of modernization and the need for educational reforms in Central Asian countries. The EU's 2016 political document was based on the view that Central Asian educational systems are lagging behind, and that cooperation can positively influence development. Although the Erasmus + Programme emphasizes regional policy dialogue between the different actors, the document is strongly present in the idea of transforming the education system and operating models to bring them into line with European education policy objectives.

Depending on actor position in the field of higher education, they were either interested in challenging the current situation or maintaining it. This meant that there were different and possible conflicting expectations at play as to the roles that the Bologna Process has in higher education development. On the one hand, the aim of the Ministry of Education and its official education policy documents was to shift towards the Bologna and Lisbon agreements. This process was supported by the field of higher education. On the other hand, it can be argued that the shift towards the Bologna Process has not happened painlessly, as opponents to the reforms have appeared.

The interview with the representative of the Ministry of Education (e.g. D, No 14) emphasized the commitment of the government to the reform of the higher education system and the willingness of universities to respond to this change. He also argued that the government is fully behind modernizing higher education system. Also, in the Education Development Strategy 2011–2020 it is stated that: the following goals related to the Tempus Programme are expected to be implemented by 2020:

“the credit system, allowing student mobility and flexibility, part-time studies in higher education, is fully introduced and thereby reflects development in other countries that have signed the Bologna and Lisbon Agreements.” (EDS 2020)

Also, it is stated in the Education Development Strategy (EDS 2020, 4) that in accordance with the provisions of the Bologna and Lisbon agreements, Kyrgyzstan will introduce an education system that will provide students with flexibility and mobility that will enable work and study integration in higher education institutions. In the Ministry of Education’s view, despite the efforts of the Ministry, there will always be universities which have not been openly committed to reforming their higher education practices:

“The key initiator of these reforms is the Ministry. In general, these reforms are supported by universities, but there are some universities that don’t actively support them.” (D, No 14).

It is argued that at the policy level, there has been full support for the reforms. From the perspective of the Ministry of Education, a factor hindering university education is the reluctance of universities to reform and innovate. With the support of the European Commission, the Kyrgyz Minister of Education Kanat Sadykov signed a mandate on March 2011 to set up the National Expert Group to promote the Bologna and Lisbon processes. The role of the representatives of the National Expert Group as advocates of European education reforms was significant. It is quite natural that those who were part of the National Expert Group had a posi-

tive attitude towards European higher education reforms and believed that universities could influence the development of higher education in the manner desired (e.g. C-B.2, No 13). The role of these actors in the field of higher education of Kyrgyzstan was secured. Members of the National Expert Group were selected by the Ministry. The responsibility of the members of the National Expert Group was to assist the universities in transferring to the Bologna Process. At this point, those members were reformist and believed that the Bologna Process to be a self-evident good that universities should want. When the implicit meaning of the Bologna Process was understood as a common good that everyone wants, reforms related to the Bologna Process become mainly a technical question. Also, in the Education Development Strategy 2020, the Bologna Process principles are self-evident goals that guides the education policy. This presented the discourse as being supported from the policy level rhetoric of ‘development’ of the higher education system.

However, in practice the higher education system and the development process is multifaceted. At the same time with reformist views, actors outside the National Expert Group questioned the motives of the National Expert Group and criticized them as the quirks of the Ministry of Education (B.2, No 10).

Currently, higher education in Kyrgyzstan includes training and re-training of bachelors, specialists (Soviet type of higher education degree) and masters. Based on the EDS 2020 in 2011, 90 percent of all students studied specialist programs and only 10 percent received a bachelor’s degree. In the EDS 2020 the target is set for that in 2020: 70 percent of students will complete the bachelor education; 20 percent of the student receive the master education and 10 percent of the students receive the specialist education. (EDS 2020, 26). Hence, the aim of the Education Strategy for higher education is that, the dual-degree system becomes a dominant system.

The debate related to the structures of the degrees is multifaceted. In the discourse on internationalization was strong faith in the Soviet era degree structure with specialist education and suspicion of new degree structures. For instance, one actor emphasized the problematic status of bachelor’s education. Actors claimed that the Law would apply misleading concepts such as unfinished higher education, when describing the degree structure at the beginning of the reform:

“Our law also had some mistakes. The formulation was that a BA is ‘unfinished’ higher education. The parents could not understand the concept. They are sending their kids to higher education institution and their diploma is ‘unfinished’ higher education.” (B.1, No 11)

It appears, however, that the wording ‘unfinished higher education degree’ does not exist in the Law of Education, but default of bachelor’s education is

considered to be ‘unfinished’. The bachelor’s education is described as a basic academic degree:

“Bachelor – academic degree of basic higher applied education, giving the right to enter the magister and engage in professional activities.” (Law on Education, Article 1).

In the same section, the master’s degree is described as full higher education. In the use of the concept ‘unfinished higher education’, one actor questioned the existence of the dual-degree structure of higher education. In fact, the bachelor’s degree gives a student the right to continue education to the master’s level but is not in itself equivalent with the former specialist degrees.

Also, questioning and critical opinions about the role of the Ministry of Education and government appears when discussing this subject with representatives from universities. For the ones that were not part of the national team of experts, they were in a situation that they did not have direct links with the Ministry of Education. For them, the Bologna Process was another mechanism to control the higher education system.

In conclusion, the quick pace with which the Bologna Process demands were accepted shows that the biggest demands on higher education in Kyrgyzstan are now set at the European level instead of in the national context. The Europeanization of the higher education was unquestioned and instead, the question of who is behind the reform initiative came to the center of the policy debate. According to representatives of the National Expert Group (C–B.2, No 15) and university representatives (B.1, No 12), initiatives on higher education reforms are coming bottom-up, but the practical need is for political decision-making. According to these views, universities have had a need for reform and the Ministry of Education has taken the lead. By adapting the system to European standards, higher education institutions strengthen their own position in global higher education.

### **5.3.3 Extensive Cooperation with Different Partners**

The discussion on the internationalization of Kyrgyzstan's higher education shows features of a national struggle (Alasuutari, 2009). Discussion is about who is entitled to control and change the rules – who has the influential power. When new global policies are introduced in a national context, legislative changes and actual changes in existing practices and procedures are always national political struggles and compromises between different actors, institutions and political ideologies (Alasuutari 2009, 70).



The most important agreements defining cooperation between the EU and Central Asia have been the 2007 EU-Central Asia Strategy for a new partnership agreement on cooperation between the EU and Central Asia. This agreement aimed to accelerate the development of the region, increase economic growth and eradicate poverty. This cooperation agreement between the EU and Central Asian countries also included the Education Initiatives for Central Asia, which aim to integrate Central Asian countries into the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). At present, the EU is in the process of running the 'EU Multiannual Indicative Re-gional Program for Central Asia 2014-2020' program in Central Asia, where higher education is part of the Sustainable Development Program. Support for EU higher education in Central Asia and practical policy will be through Erasmus (now Erasmus +) and Tempus (now Tempus +). The EU's strong message to integrate the Central Asian higher education system into the European Higher Education Area is reflected in the European Commission Guidance Document, which formulates the directions for the opening of the EU-funded Erasmus + program to Central Asia. The European Commission Guidance Document describes how the Tempus + program aims to promote the adaptation of education systems in the Central Asian countries to international policies, in partnership with international partners and donors (European Commission, 2016). Documents guiding EU and Central Asia policy on higher education have a strong message on integrating local education systems into international business models.

In the Education Development Strategy 2020 is described extensively the areas in which international organizations are promoting the development of Kyrgyz education system, financially and through projects. The government plan, EDS 2020, for international cooperation with the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, Catalytic Fund, and the Japan Fund for Poverty Reduction touches broadly on many aspects of education in a chapter which describes the challenges that Kyrgyzstan is facing after participating in the PISA assessments. OECD Pisa-research is one of the better-known large-scale assessments, in which more than 80 countries have been participating since 2000. Kyrgyzstan took part in the PISA research in 2006 and 2009. In Education Development Strategy 2020 it is written that, "the objective for that participation was to commensurate the speed of the global educational process and the one in Kyrgyzstan."

After announcement of the results of the PISA studies, certain measures were undertaken given the framework of the national budget and donor investments. It was written in EDS 2020 that:

"The funds of the projects implemented with support of the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, Catalytic Fund, and the Japan Fund for Poverty Reduction were used for the reform of the content of education, change of the system of education financing and education management,

modernization of the system of appraisal of students' achievements, development of motivation systems for teachers and schools, demonstrating the best results in teaching, providing laboratory, computer and language- studying equipment, renovation and construction of educational facilities, support of meals-provision programs and creation of environment for the children with special needs.” (EDS 2020, 10)

The EDS 2020 describes how the funds allocated from the republic's budget were meant to solve practical issues, such as printing of textbooks, maintenance of school facilities, purchase of equipment and computers, and organization of catering services for students (EDS 2020, 10). The problems that are supposed to be solved with the cooperation with international organizations are more abstract. International funds are often taken at face value and not problematized. The problems identified for solving are shaped into the policy proposals that are offered as responses to the problem. For international organizations, one way to use its influence is through ‘discursive interventions’, creating conceptual models or classifying and categorizing problems and phenomena’.

#### **5.3.4 Impact of Russia on Higher Education Policy of Kyrgyzstan**

Official education policy documents emphasize cooperation with the EU and other international organizations (such as the World Bank and UNICEF), but not mentioning cooperation with educational organizations of Russia. Debate on the impact of Russia on higher education policy in Kyrgyzstan is underway in the higher education field. The modernization of higher education and international cooperation was confronted on two sides, either cooperation with the EU and Western countries, or cooperation with Russia. One representative of the educational organization describes ironically how the government, despite its independence, has been unable to make independent decisions after all the years since independence (No. 16). The influence of Russia is still reflected in the decision-making process, but also in the identification of European policies. The methodological, scientific and pedagogical basis is still oriented towards Russia or under Russia's influence. For example, the vice-rector of one state university described how their university is very advanced:

“I am a professor and for the past 20 years I have also worked in the Rector's office. Thus, I am very knowledgeable on this and I found a lot of good information in the materials provided by the EU. Just look at my table here, these programs and methodologies are all European. Look at these materials. My work requires me to know what is going on abroad, and to implement global trends here. These are my individual initiatives.” (B.1, No 1)

However, a closer examination of the guidebooks showed that all of these European manuals and the Bologna Process Guidebooks are Russian-language works printed in Russia. Due to linguistic and financial constraints, many materials come to Kyrgyzstan directly from Russia. As a representative from an educational organization (No. 16) described, despite the 24 years of independence, the government is still not competent to make independent decisions. Russia is taken as a point of orienting education policies and approaches, and Russian textbooks and methodology are widely used. The methodological, scientific and pedagogical base is still oriented to Russia. Through Tempus projects, Kyrgyzstan could introduce liberal reforms, multilevel education and independent accreditation.

Many of the reforms in Kyrgyz higher education were implemented because of the European Commission's Tempus projects. Representatives of universities agreed that the impact of the Tempus projects was a positive and significant factor for Kyrgyzstan's higher education. At the same time, Russia's potential influence is enhanced in practice, albeit critically. Common language and history influence today's attitudes and operating models. In the discourse on modernization, there were two sides of progress. Either, the progress toward Western influences or Russian influences. The representative of the educational organization expressed concern about the possible increase in Russia's influence and the abolition of reforms:

“Through Tempus projects we were able to introduce some liberal reforms, multi-level education, and independent accreditation and so on. Where this progress will be taken in the future is very much dependent on the decisions of the Ministers. Some of them look to the West, some look to Russia. Some are more progressive, but the majority of them received their education during the Soviet times and are more sympathetic to the old ways.” (A, No 16)

Cooperation between Russia and Kyrgyzstan takes place across many sectors. For example, Kyrgyzstan joined the Eurasian Economic Union in 2015, which is considered to be the most comprehensive form of economic cooperation in the former Soviet Union. Besides that, in 2015 Russia also discussed the copying of Russian laws (such as the Anti-gay Law ‘the Act on Foreign Agents and Law on Homoprocessing’) to Kyrgyzstan and evaluated the increased popularity of Russian in Kyrgyzstan (Dzubenko 2015). The vice-rector of a university suggested that people became familiar with central government during the Soviet era, and it is difficult to give up this thinking. As a result, many Russian laws are copied to the legislation of Kyrgyzstan without deeper scrutiny. (No. 13).

As expressed by one of the representatives, Eurasian integration is perceived as a neutral progress for Kyrgyzstan, even though it is not a widely shared belief:

“There is another issue and my colleagues may disagree on this with me, but it is my opinion. There is a general political trend. We understand that Kyrgyzstan will geographically not be able to be part of the Bologna process. At the moment, there is a new trend towards Eurasian integration. So, the main orientation is Russia now, and Russia is using the old Soviet systems, there is no accreditation or quality assurance. There is a Ministry that makes all the decisions on whether the institution is working well or not.” (A, No 16)

It is possible to come to the interpretation that while Russia has emphasized cooperation with its own allies, Russia has also adopted global education reforms (Bolotov & Efremova 2007) for its own education system and has used them as a tool for increasing their own influence in Central Asia. The Bologna Declaration was signed in Russia in 2003, while Kyrgyzstan has not yet signed the Bologna Declaration although the law on education has made changes in accordance with the Bologna Process. In the mid-2000s, when Russia was discussing the process of joining the Bologna Process, researchers suggested how the Russian higher education policy balanced national development needs and the attractiveness of internationalization. It is possible to divide the interest in the Russian Bologna process both as foreign-oriented interests and internal political interests (Pursiainen & Medvedev 2005, 21–24). The interpretation of Pursiainen and Medvedev (2005) was that Russian interests also had to add a soft form of power rather than hard power. Russia's accession to the Bologna Process has been not only a Russian foreign policy approach to the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), but also a way to become a stronger global player in the field of higher education. In 2008, Russia signed a cooperation agreement with the World Bank (READ) on training development aid. In the name of the World Bank-Russia cooperation agreement, the aim was to develop training quality assessment systems in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. With the cooperation agreement, Russia wanted to increase its cooperation with quality assurance of training and international actors and export their own quality assurance model abroad. The objective of the READ project was to improve basic education and learning outcomes in low-paid countries, in particular through the methods of monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching. (Takala & Plattoeva 2012). Since the beginning of the 21st century, Russia's education policy has aimed at exporting its own training models to CIS countries and the opening of Russian university branches (the Russian federal target program 2006-2010).

There is no doubt that Russia has a special role in the field of Kyrgyz higher education. Building on this argument on political, cultural, economic or historical

context, Russia cannot be seen as having a neutral position in the field of education in Central Asia. Simultaneously, Russian education policy development is followed as “models” that can be directly translated into Kyrgyz education policy and practice. What is done in Russia serves as an example for Kyrgyzstan. In this opinion, the Russian example is thus unquestioningly associated with awareness and adoption of global ‘models’, that would be attractive for Kyrgyzstan as well:

“We also closely look at what is done in Russian lifelong education. Basically, an opportunity to constantly improve and study new things and change the profession if that is needed. We also try to improve our programs based on the demands of the market.” (B.2, No 7)

Previous history and procedures also influence education policy and what is sought by reference groups for their own education policy lines. Merrill (2012, 7) has focused attention on whether it is possible to transfer the skills offered by higher education from one culture to another. The transition from Soviet-based education to the modern education system has not been unproblematic. Skills and knowledge appreciated by the Soviet Union differ from the skills that are valued today in Kyrgyzstan. In the post-Soviet era, the universities balanced between two different realities - between old Soviet practices and information and new, contemporary demands. In part, these two different cultures and traditions coexisted and continue to affect today's university education.

Sakwa (2011, 958) writes how the present day is defined in history, especially in those countries that have been great powers in the past. In Kyrgyzstan, history as part of the Soviet Union's great power is still reflected in today's education policy, and also in research interviews, a view highlights the Soviet era higher education. For example, a vice-rector of a state university stressed how Kyrgyzstan was part of the world's best university system during the Soviet Union. In his view, it is natural to follow the Russian guidelines in Kyrgyz universities' higher education policy, due to this common higher education, cultural and linguistic history (C-B.1, No 4). Among Kyrgyzstan's professors, there are also professors who appreciate the higher education system of the Soviet Union while at the same time understanding the new demands of modern society and the many interests involved.

## 6 CONCLUSION

In a broad sense, this chapter deals with domestication of discourses of travelling reforms. This chapter has three aims: (i) summary of the findings, (ii) responding to the research tasks, and (iii) theoretical interpretation of the findings. Each of these points is elaborated in a separate sub-chapter.

The first sub-chapter provides a conclusion based on the empirical findings of this study. I start this chapter by highlighting the main findings of each of the discourses. Through these three discourses – the discourse of quality, the discourse of modernization and the discourse of internationalization – domestication of travelling reforms becomes visible. Through the framework of domestication this dissertation sheds light on the discursive adaptation of travelling reforms, which are situated in a larger social, cultural, political and economic context (see Sobe et al. 2017).

The aim of the second sub-chapter is to answer to the research task presented earlier in Chapter 3. In a broader sense, the task of this study has been to investigate the domestication of travelling reforms in the context of higher education of Kyrgyzstan. This sub-chapter summarizes the findings from the perspective of the identified theoretical gaps and research aims. I discuss the research findings from the perspective of the theoretical questions and then reflect on whether it is possible to analyze the phenomena of travelling reforms in higher education of Kyrgyzstan from the theoretical perspective of domestication.

The third task of this chapter is to interpret the empirical findings by Bourdieu's theoretical framework of 'discursive space of social reality'. Bourdieu's framework of discursive space of social reality is well suited for interpreting domestication of global education reforms in higher education of Kyrgyzstan, because this theoretical framework allows one to interpret opposing dynamics in the field of higher education of Kyrgyzstan. With Bourdieu's framework of discursive space of social reality, it is possible to deepen the understanding of adaptation of travelling reforms. Despite the different resources, conditions, and political histories of countries, surprisingly similar reforms and institutional models are constantly carried out different parts of the world (Meyer et al. 1997). With the analytical lenses of Bourdieu's discursive space of social reality, it is possible to unveil the process of domestic field battle.

### 6.1 Summary of the Findings

The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate how domestication of travelling reforms appears in Kyrgyz higher education sector through three different discourses. Through those discourses, local meanings and justifications are given for

travelling reforms in the field of Kyrgyz higher education. Those discourses are: the discourse on quality, the discourse on modernization and the discourse on internationalization. This research has sought to identify the ways in which local actors relate to world society and engage in a field battle through which global and national principles and ideas are tamed to reflect the local context. The purpose of the analyses has been to illustrate how higher education policy is discursively constructed. Simultaneously, when travelling reforms are domesticated, the national aspects, engines and brakes of the travelling reforms are revealed.

In this chapter I discuss how the government of Kyrgyzstan adopted the global education reforms language, including buzzwords as modernization, quality, efficiency and internationalization, and how those concepts have been domesticated into the local circumstances. I argue that the travelling reforms are domesticated through discourses on quality, modernization and internationalization. For example, the discourses of modernization and internationalization were combined in the education development strategy of 2010. In the first education development strategy, (EDS 2010) the modernization had strong links to international cooperation. Through international cooperation, Kyrgyzstan introduced new education practices, a modern education system and operating models that have been tested in other countries. In the EDS 2010 it was written that without the involvement of international actors, many projects and programs would not have been implemented.

### **6.1.1 The Discourse on Quality**

Although the emergence of internationally inspired discourses was clearly visible in official educational policy documents from the government of Kyrgyzstan, there are also multiple tensions associated with the discussion of education values and purposes. The discourse on quality was a dominating discourse in the field of higher education. In the discourse on quality, international influences flow into to local system through ‘global education language’, which gives added value to the reforms. In the interviews, respondents from the universities understood quality in a wide sense. However, in the guiding policy documents, quality was understood with quality assurance and monitoring. The aspiration of quality assurance and monitoring is normative: education policy guidelines seek to identify, monitor, and promote national standards of educational quality. Although they are not necessarily always agreements on the goals, they are promoting the idea of policy shifts towards evidence-based education policy.

Even though the discourse quality was linked into the travelling reforms, the need for the quality assurance and evaluation system was justified with national and cultural characters. Respondents from the university used the term ‘Kyrgyz mentality’ to explain the need for the quality assurance and evaluation

mechanisms. The principles of the quality assurance and evaluation mechanism did not differ from the international mechanisms. Anyhow, respondents said that in the context of Kyrgyzstan, hard control mechanisms are needed.

Also, the issue of corruption was linked into the discourse on quality. The need for transparency and corruption-free mechanisms in the education sector have been the leading arguments to support international educational reforms. These arguments were widely used among scholars, policy makers, university staff and other actors when creating the National Testing Centre. Also, overall lack of transparency in higher education accreditation has been used as a justification for establishment of an independent accreditation system for higher education in Kyrgyzstan. When actors justify reforms using anti-corruption premises, these reforms become understandable to both international and national audiences. The discourse on quality and corruption has a longer history. In the field of higher education, the discourse of corruption was a way to justify the need for the travelling reforms and increased control mechanisms, such as video cameras.

Need for transparency and corruption-free mechanisms in the education sector are the leading arguments to support transnational educational reforms, first establishing the National Testing Centre and secondly beginning the process of independent accreditation in Central Asian countries. It has been argued that establishment of the National Testing Centre did not lead directly to better quality teaching and equity for students but was the first step in providing a new mechanism to solve problems in the education sector (see Gebrscek 2010, 5). The National Testing Centre was established to fight against corruption, as one of the interviewees pointed out: “The National Testing Centre was established to battle corruption.” (A, No 16)

According to Heyneman (2003), many of the criteria for a corruption-free system in post-Soviet countries are linked to the quality assurance in education. For many public universities, the quality assurance system is linked to making the university procedures as transparent as possible instead of evaluating the students’ learning process. Findings demonstrate that outcome-based education with its emphasis on assessment, measuring learning outcomes, transparency and international standards is attractive to reformers in the field of higher education. Corruption is also the problem in the whole post-Soviet education sector and has serious impacts on the education sector. According to the Corruption Perceptions Index of Transparency International from 2015, Kyrgyzstan was 123rd most corrupt country out of the 168 countries on the list. In some cases, reforms are justified by the reduction of the extent of corruption and are attractive for reformers and higher education institutions.

At the beginning of the reform, the National Scholarship Test for Kyrgyzstan was financial supported by USAID and critically resisted by university rectors as they were interested in returning “income-generation mechanisms” of university admission to the universities and aggressively opposed the creation of a



centralized admission system. (Gebrscek 2010, 17). The national testing center has been functioning since 1993. Since 2002, Kyrgyzstan's national university admissions test, known by its Russian acronym, ORT, (*Obsche respublikanskoe testirovanie*), has assessed each student's ability to study at the university level. The tests are based on testing a student's abilities and not directed towards their knowledge of what they have learnt at secondary school. In 2014, to gain admission to a university, all students had to pass the national university admission test. Those interviewed who were looking at the admission test from the perspective of cutting corruption and nepotism from post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan's education system spoke positively about the ORT test. For those interviewed, it seems that ORT has improved transparency in admission processes for getting into university.

The Bologna Process provided Kyrgyzstan with a higher education system to integrate towards European and Western higher education systems. Part of the Bologna process reforms has been developing the quality assurance and evaluation system, introduction of a two-cycle system (bachelor's / master's), introducing the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS). From a wider perspective, one of the main principles and expected outcomes of the Bologna process and EHEA has been the creation of a higher education system in line with the needs of society and the labor market:

“preparing students for life as active citizens in a democratic society; preparing students for their future careers and enabling their personal development; creating and maintaining a broad, advanced knowledge base; and stimulating research and innovation” (Leuven Communiqué 2009)

Chankselaini (2018, 282) argues, that development of higher education in Europe has been going more in the economic direction rather than in a cultural or democratic direction. This economic discourse was also visible in the field of higher education of Kyrgyzstan. In the discourse on quality, the discourse of connection between the labor market and quality was dominant. European integration has been a powerful driver for higher education reforms in Kyrgyzstan. From the Bologna principles is written, that the governments and employers need to co-operate:

“Governments and HEIs will need to communicate more with employers and other stakeholders on the rationale for their reforms. We will work, as appropriate, within our governments to ensure that employment and career structures within the public service are fully compatible with the new degree system.” (London Communiqué 2007)

### **6.1.2 The Discourse on Modernization**

The transformation of higher education in Kyrgyzstan started right after independence. Generally, this transformation process is perceived as necessary for improving the higher education system and to ‘modernize’ the system to meet the demands of the market economy. The development, progress and Western education reforms are discussed in the discourse on modernization. In the EDS 2010 and the EDS 2020 the concept of modernization is used to demonstrate the willingness to change the higher education system. The Soviet system approach was to modernization, even though the system did not apply this ideology (Sakwa 2013).

The legal frameworks for higher education institutions are important. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the first step was to write a law of education. Since the Soviet system had shown its weakness, it was natural in this situation to seek inspiration from the other direction, from the West. The first Law on Education right after independence in 1992 was important for promoting the new political structure and economic environment. At the Law on Education principles of the education were established. The new Law of Education made the privatization of higher education possible. Change by change, Western reforms have become part of the Kyrgyz system.

The reform of independent accreditation is challenging the current discourse of higher education. This reform is part of the discourse on modernization, as it has many expectations of reconstructing the higher education system. Actors in the field either supported the reform of independent accreditation or opposed to it. Actors with a strong position in the field of higher education supported the reform of independent accreditation. Instead, those actors who were worried about their own position in the field of higher education did not see the reform as desirable. The criticism was focused on the implementation of the reform. Although legal changes were made, there was no capacity to implement the reform.

When interviews were conducted in 2015, who had the dominance of power in the field of high education was a deeply discussed topic. In September 2016, the law of independent accreditation came into force. Due to this reform, the power of the Ministry of Education and Sciences over the higher education sector will decrease and the independent agencies will give licenses for accreditation. This current reform will reshape the university sector. Some of the vice-rectors explain the current reforms as the way to shut down the poorly performing universities, while others are worried about the effects that it might have on the young people that are outside the universities and the labor market. Respondents were worried about a tendency for cutting down the number of higher education institutions. From the perspective of university actors the Ministry of Education and Sciences was actively preparing for this process. From the the university perspective the

Ministry of Education and Sciences wants to improve quality by cutting the quantity. (B.1, No 3)

Establishing independent agencies in the education sector has been a global trend, which has been supported by the OECD and the World Bank. Besides this isomorphic development, which will be ready for approval by powerful outsiders, there is also a local need and discourse for the reform of independent accreditation. The reason for independent accreditation comes from the historical disorganization. The number of universities has grown too much, and the Ministry of Education and Sciences is unable to deal with the organization of accreditation alone. Based on the findings, adopting independent accreditation reform gives local actors and universities a competitive edge and being part of international standards.

In the discourse on modernization, the function of higher education was discussed. Representatives of higher education institutions presented their worries about the radicalization and external threat. Politicians of Central Asian regimes are typically isolating politics from Islam (Marat 2008), and policies are justified by referring to the potential conflicts. This mindset has also been accepted by university actors.

The most visible change since independence has been the expansion of higher education. These days, nearly half of secondary school graduates become university students. The empirical data indicate that there are two discourses explaining the function of the university: occupational discourse and cultivational discourse. The occupational discourse says that the role of the universities is to keep young people occupied. While the cultivational discourse seeks to explain the educational faith and the willingness to get a higher education degree at any price.

### **6.1.3 The Discourse on Internationalization**

The waves of global reform have had a tendency to diffuse around the globe and reshape different societies and change national education policies. In the post-Soviet context, reshaping the education system has been even more visible. Right after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, criticism of Soviet practices was visible and the floor was open for international practices in the field of higher education. The power and control structure were reorganized in higher education during these first years of independence.

Internationalization in the higher education of Kyrgyzstan has developed over the last 20 years, from a marginal point of interest to a central factor. Globalization has also expanded the influence of competition and market economies in Kyrgyzstan. Globalization, competition, and market processes have reinforced the development toward strategic partnerships for higher education.

Previous studies of the education system of Kyrgyzstan (DeYoung 2011) has presented a significant decline in the level of teaching and learning in secondary schools and a significant growth in the number of students in higher education institutions. Currently there are too many universities in Kyrgyzstan, but not enough schools and kindergartens, which increases bribery. As one of interviewee said, people actually give bribes to get into kindergartens, or into schools. With over 40 students per class, there is no other way, he argues. (No 18).

However, at the same time higher education has become more expensive and less connected to the labor market compared to Soviet times. In the discourses of the Kyrgyz higher education system there are two opposing views on the need for control: either more control is needed to govern the higher education system or the control structure should be reduced and be given more decision-making power to private operators.

In the higher education policy of Kyrgyzstan, one of the strategic foci has been global partnerships. Even the EDS 2020 is written on how the programs and reforms are planned with international partners. Those partners are not only European partners but also partners from Russia and global organizations (e.g. the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the Catalytic Fund and the Japan Fund for Poverty Reduction). It is written in the EDS 2020 that with the help of international organizations the majority of strategic reforms can be implemented. The partnership between different organization and Kyrgyzstan remains bilateral.

In the Central Asian context Kyrgyzstan is the first parliamentary state and most open country in Central Asia. In connection with openness, Kyrgyzstan is an attractive platform for exported programs, students and international innovation. From that perspective, openness and ‘west-mindedness’ are also ways to reconstruct Kyrgyz identity and educational reforms. Being open to innovation and new approaches is not self-evident in Central Asia. As one civil servant from the Ministry of Education pointed out, they are not only open for partners from Europe, but for all other partners as well. In the discourse on internationalization, the openness is regarded as a specific goal. Since independence, the higher education system has been in the process of introducing international and global dimensions in higher education, to improve the goals, quality and functions of higher education. Even though respondents highlighted the openness and internationalization of the society of Kyrgyzstan, many aspects of the internationalization and Bologna Process are difficult to accomplish. For example, the mobility of students is part of the internationalization of higher education. In particular, the European Commission’s policy to stimulate this manner of mobility has contributed to that instrumental approach for higher education. Even, in Kyrgyzstan the requirements for mobility were understood as part of the higher education internationalization process. It is questionable, however, whether the imbalanced and oversimplified approach to mobility matches the society of Kyrgyzstan.

The Bologna Process is one of the most comprehensive reforms of higher education in Kyrgyzstan. The idea of the Bologna process is based on the principles of modernization. Depending on the position of respondents, they were either saying that the Bologna Process reforms were implemented by the Ministry of Education and Sciences or it has been the initiative of the higher education institutions. Different actors want to get ownership of the active implementation of the Bologna process. The dynamics between different national actors were complex. The Ministry of Education and Sciences established a National Expert Group in 2011 to promote the Bologna Process reforms at the institution level. Those actors were chosen by the Ministry of Education and Sciences and had undergone training in Europe.

During the interviews, respondents said that education has been valued in Kyrgyzstan as has have family values and traditions. Higher education certification has meanings for the whole family. In the society of Kyrgyzstan, studying the higher education degree is in many cases the only way to avoid working in agriculture or in the bazaar, and for girls, it might be the only way to avoid early marriage. Sending the children to university is seen as a moral duty of parents.

Simola et al. (2013) and Kettunen (2008) split the discourse of power in two separate discourses: the converging discourse and the controlling discourse. Kyrgyzstan's education policy is situated between Soviet history and the influence of Western innovations. It is possible to argue that Kyrgyzstan has never had its own national education policy. In the converging discourse, power relations are present when education policy decisions are balanced between the historical and western approaches. The concept of path dependency and convergence becomes useful here. In the controlling discourse, the emphasis is on the national higher education policy issues related to the local distribution of power, such as quality control and evaluation issues, battles against corruption in higher education and the role of the ministry of education in promoting reforms and controlling the higher education institutions.

The Bologna Process and quality assurance and evaluation systems have become the hallmark of the current modernization and internationalization process in the field of higher education in Kyrgyzstan. Several evaluation and quality programs are used to modify power relations in Kyrgyzstan. Even ideological premises of quality assurance policy in Kyrgyzstan have been linked to national needs - the fight against corruption, the mechanisms of quality assurance procedures are imported from supranational practices and programs. Adopting these global standards and policy models, Kyrgyzstan is not only changing governance models of education but also believing that these models will be good for national education development. Transnational organizations and donors are not only taking over the education system by implementing global standards, but local actors are also convinced that these global policy models can solve local

problems. In the discourse of control in higher education local actors do not automatically recognize the supremacy of international actors. Despite increasing international interdependence, which seems to generate pressures to adopt global standards, there is little evidence across the globe that nation states are losing control over their education systems.

Bennett (1991) used the concept of convergences in considering similarities in different societies' development by looking at the structures, processes and functions. In Kyrgyzstan convergence of political instruments (such as the Bologna Process) is the most visible way to see the coherence between Kyrgyz and global education practices. The Bologna Process is one of the most extensive examples of policy borrowing processes (Brøgger 2014). In the interviews, the European Union is introduced as one of the most important single players behind the reforms. The European Union is perceived through its Tempus programs. Kyrgyzstan has been taking part in the Tempus program since 1995. The intention of Tempus has been to establish international cooperation between Kyrgyz and EU higher education institutions. The program has also encouraged and reinforced cooperation with neighboring countries, and international contact has improved the likelihood of student mobility. To some extent, Tempus has contributed to the harmonization of national higher education through the introduction of 'modern' curricula and the updating of courses. Tempus has been instrumental in raising awareness about the Bologna principles. For those who I interviewed, the Tempus seems to have been one of the most important single programs in modernizing the Kyrgyz higher education system. Tempus was presented as being independent from government pressure and for being a partner directly with universities. It was presented as the only change maker in the field of higher education reforms (e.g. C–B.2, No 15).

Akcali and Engin-Demir (2013) argues in their book that Kyrgyzstan cannot isolate itself from the demands, priorities and pressure of international actors, even if they are sometimes in conflict with domestic conditions. Kyrgyzstan politics,

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<sup>8</sup> Bennett (1991, 218) presents five possible ways in which convergence can happen:

1. Convergence of policy priorities to combine objectives to address common political problems.
2. Convergence of political content, which means a formal policy, such as the harmonization of administrative rules and regulations.
3. Convergence of political instruments, which means coherence between the institutional and administrative tools.
4. Convergence of the political consequences or effects, which means that the results of the implementation become more or less similar than others.
5. Convergence of political styles, which means that the way how political performances uses similar shapes.

education and identity are challenged with uncertainty between the old and the new on one hand, and domestic and international on the other.

Path dependency in the education policy is present even if it is not always requested. Merrill (2012, 7) has pointed out that in the post-Soviet context, the transformation process from a post-Soviet education system towards a modern education system is complex. She questions whether the skills provided by higher education could possibly be transfer from one culture to another. In the early Soviet period, learning new political ideas together with told ‘truths’ was a way to balance between the two cultures – old Soviet and new independent society. Even now these two kinds of cultures and traditions are alongside one another. The older generation of university professors and pedagogues values the Soviet education model. Also, historical reasons increase the willingness to cooperate with Russia in the field of higher education.

## **6.2 Discourses of Travelling Reforms**

In this chapter I provided answers to the research tasks I demonstrated earlier in Chapter 3. The first research task was: to analyze how and why Kyrgyzstan conforms to global higher education policy trends. Second, to analyze the roles and argumentation of the local actors for implementing travelling reforms for and around universities, and to compare them to the international agenda of higher education in Kyrgyzstan. And finally, to identify and interpret the discursive construction of domestication of travelling reforms in higher education in Kyrgyzstan. My overall research task was to understand, how have the higher education discourses in Kyrgyzstan been domesticated in the context of international higher education reforms?

Global catchwords and ideas spread across countries, but the meanings and effects of the global education language in national situations are less easily transferred. In the higher education of Kyrgyzstan, some aspects of the policy text are foregrounded, and others are forgotten. Usage of the travelling reform discourse not only describes the spreading of conceptual change, but also create and recreate the national and local context in which the education reforms are implemented.

The field of higher education is interconnected with other fields. To analyze the domestication in the field of higher education in Kyrgyzstan, the concepts of internationalization, reform and change become central. The concept of internationalization is closely linked into the concept of globalization, which is a process that focuses on the worldwide flow of ideas, resources, people, economy, knowledge and services. The internationalization of higher education is the process of integrating an international, intercultural and global dimension of education into the goals and premises of higher education in the national and/or institutional level (Knight 2003). The concepts of reform and change are crucial

to the process of internationalization. When analyzing the process of internationalization in the field of higher education in Kyrgyzstan, two processes are identifiable. First, the process of reforms, which means improving the system by amending the strategy and/or agenda behind the higher education policy. Second, the process of change, which can be understood as the activity that follows from the strategy. Educational change can differ from the planned educational reform. The aim of this study was to analyze the domestication of travelling reforms in the field of higher education in Kyrgyzstan. With the concept of domestication (e.g. Alasuutari & Qadir 2013) it is possible to understand the roles and willingness of different organizations and their actors at the local level to implement international reforms and practices. The field of higher education in Kyrgyzstan is the context in which actors are trying to strengthen the discourses that they considered valuable in the field.

Also, the findings of this study demonstrate the crucial role of the university as an institution in the transformation of the higher education system. In historical perspective, the university as a social institution has shown considerable durability and the university has kept its special place amongst the more important institutions in the society. To understand the change in higher education institutions it is important to understand the nature of the university as a social institution, constrained and constituted by the social context as well as the internal institutional logic.

The guiding policy documents highlighted the importance of the international actors rather than national institutional actors. The role of financiers in the transformation of the higher education sector was discussed in the EDS. Instead, the role of the universities was discussed in detail. For example, EDS 2010 presented strategies to increase the availability and quality of education. One goal was to reform the content of education: “Develop a national curriculum with a view to optimizing the learning workload and bringing it into line with modern educational aims” (EDS 2010, 19). EDS 2010 describes how many of the education policy goals outlined in earlier education guiding documents (such as Education Doctrine 2010) have not been realized due to financial deficiencies. As a result, the new education strategy, EDS 2010, has been made in cooperation with international donors. For example, the projects supported by the Asian Development Bank and UNICEF are specifically mentioned in EDS 2010. In that discussion, applying the concept of modernization has been operationalized with international goals.

The European Commission’s paper ‘Opening of the EU-funded Erasmus+ Programme to Central Asia’ 2016 notes that the aim of the cooperation between the EU and the Central Asian countries is modernization and reforms:

“In the priority areas for cooperation agreed between the EU and the Central Asian partners a common agenda has been developed for



modernization and reform, building on regional policy dialogues and expert working groups.”

The discourse on modernization represents targets that education policy implementations are reaching for and it is not always exclusively the task of international organizations. One of the ten priority policy areas in Education Development Strategy for 2020 was “modernization of educational content, taking into account the competence-based approach.” In the Education Development Strategy, the modernization was not particularly operationalized in anyway. Thus, the discourse on modernization was used to strengthen the idea of transformation and harmonization of the education system. The meanings of the concept of modernization was left to the readers, albeit with an idea that modernization presents something good related to concepts of innovation and development. Also, connecting the modernization with an idea of a competence-based approach distinguishes the discourse on modernization from the Soviet discourse, in which the emphasize was more on subject-based approaches. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the discursive education policy talk in policy documents has been creating conceptual models for Kyrgyzstan. In the Education Development Strategy 2020, national strategic intent is based on a learning outcomes-based approach. Although this approach is nothing new and has been present since the 1990s, education providers are at different stages of putting it into practice. By combining the concept of modernization with the concept of a competence-based approach it is creating an image of progress.

The image of progress, the idea of development and the belief of modernization is a well-believed discourse in the field of higher education. Despite these aims being firmly established, actors in the field of higher education state that along with the discourse of progress are deep national and cultural understanding of higher education. How these two discourses are combined is described as a domestication. The particular focus of this empirical work was to define the key concepts and definitions of the process of domestication of higher education reforms. Higher education in Kyrgyzstan has been formed by a range of policy actors – governmental and academic, national and international – which affect each other and generate energy between each other. This tension becomes visible when analyzing the use of these different concepts. Concepts such as international receive opposing meanings in the field of higher education in Kyrgyzstan. The meaning of concepts, such as international, is ambiguous and loaded with stakeholders’ interests.

Analyses of the use of language strengthen the understanding that higher education policy of Kyrgyzstan is increasingly constructed in international policy making arenas, and then recontextualized in national policies. Contested concepts are represented as generally accepted background knowledge in higher education policy. The concepts of quality and modernization and efficiency are well used in

the official policy documents of Kyrgyz higher education and are accepted as a part of program declarations. However, these concepts have landed in the field of higher education of Kyrgyzstan from the international policy making arenas, but they have taken their positions in the field of higher education in Kyrgyzstan. Actors at the universities employ the concepts of modernization and quality, yet the concepts of efficiency and accessibility are less used in the university-level discussions. Even though actors employ the concepts that have a global origin, the meanings given to those concepts are explicitly or implicitly drawn from local background knowledge.

Modernization of the education system and the concept of a modern education system depicts progressive education as diverse compared to the old system. In terms of empirical findings there is some diversity, even if the term 'modern' refers to the current situation, of higher education – while the interpretation of the modern education system is challenging the idea of higher education. The modern education system, in turn, is assumed to produce education programs which are based on 'international standards', and which are not distorted by national problems and issues. This means that referring to the 'modern education system' represented the ideal model, the archetype of the education system, not internal problems in the country (e.g. child labor).

The discursive structures vary considerably, depending on the argument being constructed. While modern education represents the current higher education system, the concept of modern applies to the system per se. In that discourse, the modern education system can turn into an advanced level system by borrowing influences from international reforms.

The concept of quality is part of the larger higher education policy phenomenon globally including in Kyrgyzstan. The concept of quality is widely used in discourses, which actively promotes globally influenced education reforms. Transnational pressures have been loaded onto education policy with the demands for quality of the education system. The actors who discussed the quality of higher education referred to the history of the higher education system and weaknesses of the current reforms. In the discussion with academics, the quality of education was not automatically linked to the transnational education principles as it was referred to in the government's official education policy documents. In the discourse on quality, the legacy of the Soviet education system played a significant role.

The analysis reveals that the concept of international is loaded with intense conceptions of the national and cultural features. Actors identified the concept of internationalization by common consent. Consequently, the concept of international includes the understanding of open-minded students and citizens, and backward authorities. National and cultural features are used to explain the openness of Kyrgyz people to international reforms. The concept of internationalization implies positive attributes, while respondents talked about the

students. In that discourse, the students are promoting internationalization, which bounces from national attributes. The discourse of the Kyrgyz mentality is used to demonstrate the national peculiarities. However, actors outside of the Ministry of Education and Sciences arrange motivations of the governmental actors to utilize the idea of internationalization. Consequently, internationalization goals of the Ministry of Education and Sciences are criticized to be an arrangement to control the higher education sector.

The concept of efficiency in education policy is borrowed from the market economy terminology. Usage of the concept illustrates that the Education Development Strategy of Kyrgyzstan follows along international lines. Actors at the universities do not exploit the concept of efficiency. An analysis of the research data lead to an understanding that the concept was used to promote new reforms. Thus, the original idea behind the concept in the field of higher education in Kyrgyzstan was to make change, to challenge the current higher education system. The introduction of the new policy model challenges logics, rules and discourses in the field of higher education in Kyrgyzstan. As earlier argued, the discussion of the new education model or idea initiate a policy process the form of which can be described as a battle in a national political field. This means that in a policy process, the boundaries of the fields (e.g. the field of higher education in Kyrgyzstan) are blurred and the meanings of the power relations increase (see Alasuutari 2015).

The analysis of the findings shows that internationally inspired education reform discourse is domesticated through locally constructed discourses, such as the discourse of national openness for new ideas, the discourse of Kyrgyz culture and the discourse of transparency. Those locally constructed discourses are part of the wider discourses of travelling reforms. Even though national and cultural features were not visible in the official guiding documents, the actors at the institutions combined the discourse of the travelling reforms into the locally constructed discourses. The higher education policy of Kyrgyzstan is balanced with the national development needs and the desire to integrate with European principles, international standards and best practices. There is a wide range of interests in higher education, from foreign policy interests through to national interests. Foreign policy interests include a desire to modernize higher education and to integrate higher education with the information age and global market standards and requirements. National interests are more related to economic, social and administrative reforms. (see Pursiainen & Medvedev 2005, 21–24). In domestication, those interests were discursively constructed into the discourses of travelling reforms.

The findings of this study show the importance of the national and local circumstances in adaptation of travelling reforms. In Chapter 2, I wrote about how world culture theorists usually understate the role of national and local circumstances while analyzing global phenomena in higher education

development. But not all of them are. For example, Buckner's (2016) study of changing ideas about the relationship between the nation-state and the university in the international higher education development discourse through quantitative content analysis has shown how the role of higher education is shifting from nation building to global competitiveness. The emphasis on the private sector has grown since the 1990s and the role of the nation-state shifts from manpower planning to strategic planning. However, the massive content analysis shows that the importance of the nation-state has not waned. By looking at discursive development since the 1960s, this study shows that the new concepts of learning, quality and assurance have become the dominant in the documents in the 2000s. Interestingly, when looking at the most frequently mentioned concepts by decade, this shows that the role of higher education in modern societies has not changed fundamentally. The concept of development, country and research has stayed among the top 20 concepts in all five decades. Also, the discussions about the public university are not disappearing even though discussion of the private sector increased. Beckner (2016) wrote:

“the emphasis on the global does not replace the national, instead national and global development are viewed as largely complementary: national development promotes global development, and vice versa.”

After independence, the significance of higher education has become global and increasingly diverse in Kyrgyzstan. In recent decades, the mobility of people and information, transparency and the economic interdependence have affected higher education, which makes the higher education system of Kyrgyzstan increasingly dependent on global higher education tendencies and ideas.

### **6.3 The Discursive Space of Higher Education in Kyrgyzstan**

In previous chapters I addressed the puzzle of the localization of global education ideas and travelling reforms through domestication. The analytical orientation of this dissertation combines a theoretical understanding of domestication with methodological use of discursive space of social reality. The discursive space of social reality fruitfully complements domestication rather than being in opposition to it.

In comparative education research, the driving force for policy change is often divided into local or international notions. Reform has national or international premises. With the concept of domestication (Alasuutari 2014), wider the understanding of the policy processes and highlights the importance of the interdependency between global and local levels of education policies. Alasuutari argues that the policy-making process is globally synchronized but developed

nationally with local flavors. In the theory of domestication, the focus is on the process of how local policy makers justify certain globally approved education reforms and attaching them to a local policy context. In that view, the domestication of policy models in the context of nation-states refers particularly to a process in which existing routines and practices within the nation-state are challenged through the introduction of new exogenous policy models. In these processes, new models and ideas are brought into the local context so that they are adjusted to local conditions. As an outcome, models are realized as actual practices, so that they also eventually become a self-evident part of the practices that the exogenous origin of the models and ideas gradually disappears, and they come to be seen primarily as 'domestic' (e.g. Alasuutari 2009, 67– 68; Alasuutari et al. 2013a; Alasuutari et al. 2013b; Qadir & Alasuutari 2013; Syväterä & Alasuutari 2013)

Even though in the theory of policy borrowing and lending, the focus is on the phenomena of globalized education practices, the policy transfer happens in a certain space of social reality. Looking at the discourses of Kyrgyz higher education policy through Bourdieu's concepts of discursive space of social reality and the field, the dynamics of discursive construction of higher education reforms becomes visible. Focusing on the development of higher education reforms in Kyrgyzstan, Bourdieu (2002a, 2003) provides tools for analyzing the discursive field of higher education and the domestication of global higher education reforms. Bourdieu's ideas and concepts have played a minor role in studies of policy borrowing and lending, although they have been applied in analyses of national, supranational and global trends in educational policy.

Bourdieu's concepts of 'field', and 'autonomy' become helpful when illustrating how different dimension autonomy describes the effects of current moves of Kyrgyzstan towards democratization, internationalization and globalized market-orientation in higher education (Maton 2005, 688). The field is a hierarchical entity in which its actors and institutions have different positions. The concept of 'autonomy' is the centerpiece of Bourdieu's field theory. The autonomy of the field is reflected in the way it creates its own values and rules of success. However, the relative nature of autonomy means that values cannot form the field, but both economic and political factors play a key role in building a field. When the structure of the field has changed, features that guaranteed success in Soviet times will no longer bring a similar position to the field of higher education in the era of marketization when economic and political factors have changed.

Bourdieu (1977) describes doxa as a 'misrecognition' established through tacit consensus in a process in which 'analogical reproduction' and 'mimetic representation' lead to the formation and perpetuation of the 'taken-for-grantedness' of the 'objective' world. Doxa flows from a practical sense that is established in relation to habitus and the structure to which it is attuned (Bourdieu 1990, 68). Bourdieu explains that doxa is only foregrounded and made explicit

through the interrelation of divergent, novel or competing discourses and practices. He feels that this is most often found in the context of culture contact or with political and economic crises (1977, 168). For Bourdieu, crisis is then necessary but never sufficient for the questioning of doxa to arise within any one specific community (1977, 169). Doxa can be visible in the discursive space. The discursive space (see Section 3.3) focuses on how the borders of doxa are defended by orthodoxa and challenged by heterodoxa. Questions of existence of doxa becomes visible in a situation in which it is interpreted critically (heterodoxy). Heterodoxy creates a critical discursive space in which an undisputed space, doxa, will be challenged and questioned with argumentation and discussion. Groups benefiting from the dominant situation are assumed to try to keep as many practices as possible inside the doxa unquestioned, and therefore form an orthodoxy to argue for these doxic practices. In other words, orthodoxy seeks to legitimate the prevailing doxa. (Bourdieu 2002, 164–170).

The discourse analysis of the guiding education policy documents and interview data yields interesting results about how actors in the field of higher education in Kyrgyzstan frame transformation of higher education and why they see travelling reforms as being beneficial to their country. The three most common discourses reflected the logic of travelling reforms: (i) the discourse on quality, (ii) the discourse on modernization, and (iii) the discourse on internationalization. Influences of travelling reforms strive to challenge the current undisputed space, ‘doxa’ of higher education of Kyrgyzstan by using arguments of these discourses. The concept of ‘modernization’ is used in policy documents and interviews to justify local needs for international reforms. Modernization is used as a synonym for internationally oriented educational reforms. By the discourse of heterodoxa, the doxa, undisputed space is challenged. The discourse of heterodoxa is not trying to make a revolution or radically change the system, rather it smoothly promotes global discourse in the field of higher education of Kyrgyzstan and serves as a counterpart to the national and historical continuum. Existence of doxa is challenged with heterodoxa, which is promoted by external actors, international donors and the EU via the Tempus program.

With the discourse of the ‘orthodoxa’, actors defend the borders of doxa and try to maintain the current situation. The discourse of orthodoxa is described as orthodoxal discourse. In orthodoxal discourse, actors use arguments supporting the current doxa and are willing to keep the current situation stable. Arguments supporting the doxa are conservative and tend to keep the situation as similar as possible. In the research data, orthodoxa was justified with elements of historical, cultural and institutional developments of the higher education system. In that dis-course, arguments related to the Kyrgyz mentality were used. The concept of the Kyrgyz mentality was used to describe reforms that actors were opposed to. In orthodoxal discourse, views that defend the doxa are related to the Kyrgyz educational system’s historical development. The Kyrgyz education

system was developed during the Soviet years, which has given its features to the higher education system.

In the current discourse of higher education, the old Soviet education model is still visible. Even if the official policy documents show that the higher education system of Kyrgyzstan complies with international standards, in practice, the education system is still under the influence of old habits and practices in many ways. The history of higher education systems (re)construct the understanding of the doxa, shared understanding of the current system. The perception of the modern education system driven by international influences is in many respects an 'ideal model', which in practice only works in part. Based on these different elements from the historical Soviet educational model and the 'modern' higher educational model, which is intended to compensate for the Soviet higher education model, the current 'doxa' undisputed space of higher education of Kyrgyzstan is formed. In the following table (Table 4), the findings of this study are analyzed by the framework of doxa, heterodoxa and orthodoxa.

Discourse	Heterodoxa	Orthodoxa
I  Discourse on Quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Global influences appear as a 'global education language', which gives added value to the reforms.</li> <li>Concepts such as quality, modernization, international and efficiency describes the contemporary higher education policy objectives.</li> <li>The concept of 'Kyrgyz mentality' is applied to demonstrate the national openness for internationalization.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The emphasis on educational traditions and history of the country.</li> <li>Nostalgic views about Soviet-era education system – education was high quality and higher education was appreciated.</li> <li>Resistance to internationalization.</li> </ul>
II  Discourse on Modernization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Opposing views on the 'ownership' of higher education reforms.</li> <li>For universities Tempus presented reform that is independent of governmental pressure.</li> <li>For the Ministry of Education Tempus was part of their strategy.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The dual degree of higher education is not suitable in the society of Kyrgyzstan.</li> <li>Bachelor's degree is understood as 'unfinished' education.</li> <li>Providing higher education for masses will improve the security and stability of the country.</li> </ul>
III  Discourse on Internationalization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Belief that the modern higher education system cooperates with labor market.</li> <li>The role of donors and international actors is highlighted in the Education Development Strategy. The Education Development Strategy is written with international donors and actors. The projects of external donors will be the ones mainly implemented in the field of higher education.</li> <li>The different policy actors (national/transnational) affect each other and generate energy between each other depending on the cultural and historical features.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Higher education policy objectives and the reality in society do not match.</li> <li>Historical value of education is discussed.</li> <li>Russia is used as a reference society for higher education reforms, because of the historical, cultural and linguistical reasons. Russia impacts indirectly on higher education reforms.</li> </ul>

**Table 4.** Discursive space of social reality of higher education of Kyrgyzstan.



## 7 DISCUSSION

The analyses of the findings are based on the idea of the domestication. The results of the analyses are interpreted by the Bourdieu's framework of discursive space of social realities. In Bourdieu's framework, fields such as higher education have their own discourses, fundamental beliefs that are shared by others on the field. When analyzing a field of higher education, a key objective in Bourdieusian analysis is to uncover how powerful actors, organizations and individuals, and analyze how do they succeed in maintaining power relationships by reproduction of the knowledge and discourses. The status of power relations between different actors determines the structure of the field. The processes of transformation after the collapse of the Soviet Union and adopting new global education market principles have changed the order of the valued capitals in the field of higher education. Consequently, it is not possible to view higher education change as a single entity or process, rather to be able to make a change in the field of higher education it is essential to understand the logic of the discourse structure of higher education, which consists of various discourses with conflicting perspectives.

Akcali and Engin-Demir (2013) argues that Kyrgyzstan cannot isolate itself from demands, priorities and pressure of international actors, even if they are sometimes in conflict with domestic conditions. Kyrgyzstan politics, education and identity are challenged with uncertainty between the old and the new on the other hand and domestic and international on the other. Dukanbaev (2004, 17) argued that, building an educational basis for an independent Kyrgyzstan is a combination of neoliberal logic and the idea on the local nationality, ethnic Kyrgyz. The field of higher education is not based on consensus, but it is formed because of the continuing conflict. In this sense, when the same new global policy models are introduced into local models and structures, those models get local influences. Rather than asking what happens to local cultures in this process, it is more interesting to ask how different government actors, or individuals working in different occupations in the field of higher education, adopt and promote them as worldwide models. Government actors and institutions are trying to defend their own positions on the field of higher education in relation to national or global circumstances. For a national government conforming to international standards and adopting global education models, they will improve their own position in the game field of global higher education. Equally, higher education institutions borrow the global reforms to improve their own position on the national field of higher education.

Reeves (2005, 17) has pointed out how the literature on educational reform in the former Soviet Union has tended to understate the role of the culture when travelling policies are locally encountered and negotiated. At the same time, the

significance of current political and social context is diminished when new international reforms are introduced. In doing so, there is a risk that policy objectives will remain at the level of discourse and not become a practical level activity. For example, Steiner-Khamsi (2012, 3) has been critical that the objectives in the Education Development Strategy 2020 (EDS 2020) and education goals are following more 'international standards', 'best practices' and 'global education narratives' than local education policy initiatives. The theory of domestication helps to see beyond this dichotomy. This approach will help in viewing interconnections and dependencies between the local and global influences.

The findings of this study argue that using the discourse of travelling reforms is a requirement for receiving finance from donors. Those who use these global discourses are playing the game. Using the global language and following 'the international model of education' is part of the 'field game', the domestic field battle, where players strengthen their positions on the field. As Alasuutari and Qadir point out (2014, 3), in domestication theory those actors who can relate to the world society and engage in a field battle through which global trends and ideas are tamed to the local context, are successful in the game field. And those who are successfully playing this game are not only aiming to strengthen their position on the national field, but also on the global higher education field.

With this study I participate in the theoretical discussion of post-socialist education transformation. This study contributes to this scholarship by proposing the concept of domestication as a tool for understanding the post-socialist educational transformation. For example, Chirikov (2018) writes how globalization affects on local higher education policy-making in post-socialist space of Russia. The first global university rankings (Academic Ranking of World Universities, ARWU) in 2003 had an impact on the development of the higher education in Russia. It was shocking for Russian policymakers how weakly universities performed in those rankings. Only one university was ranked among the world's top 100 by the ARWU. Those rankings impacted on higher education policy as the Russian government introduced a number of efforts to improve global standing of its universities. Even though, strengthening the global competition of national universities became important, the distinctive system of higher education did not change. National policymakers constantly seek ways to improve the knowledge-power correlation in the global arenas (Oleksiyenko & Li 2018). Anyhow, historical legacies on higher education systems, competition and collaboration influences on higher education systems.

Russian president Vladimir Putin characterized the collapse of the Soviet Union as "the greatest geopolitical tragedy of the 20th century", which had influences on his country and beyond (see Washington Times 2005; Oleksiyenko & Li 2018). Even though the Kremlin spent a great deal of time in limiting these statements, what was obvious is that the Russian government and the population

of the country continued to suffer over its status and identity crisis (Oleksiyenko & Li 2018, 7).

Even, the internationalization of higher education is important for Russia, the policymakers in Russia “consistently emphasized the need for an active opposition to the hegemony of the western powers and viewed higher education internationalization as a tool for public diplomacy and geopolitical competition” (Malinovskiy & Chankseliani 2018, 292). Although, the soft power discourse is more intense in Russia, it remains how the hegemony of western powers is not self-evident in the post-socialist education space. Russia intend to further expand its geopolitical influence (Malinovskiy & Chankseliani 2018, 300) and in this context Central Asian countries, such as Kyrgyzstan, could be subject of action. As this study of domestication of travelling reforms investigated that historical, social and cultural aspects of the higher education system play central role in the transformation of higher education.

## **7.1 Domestication of Travelling Reforms**

The perceived convergence of educational systems has become one of the central topics of comparative education, especially through the world culture theory, which seeks to rationalize education policy as driven by the logic of science and progress. Scholars have criticized the methods and evidence used in studies of world culture research and argued that the methods and strategies used in these studies do not support claims of a “world culture” but instead tend to produce them (Carney, Rappley & Silova, 2012). Following the critique from other scholars with analysis elaborated here, I argue that the world culture theory tends to explain the education convergence process through a particular lens, emphasizing the breadth of the countries studied instead of concentrating on in-depth analysis in one country. Anyhow, in the future research would be fruitful to elaborate more specifically pros and cons of different theories, such as World Culture theory and policy borrowing and lending.

World culture theories proposed a set of hypotheses explaining the global expansion of mass schooling (Meyer 1977) to explain that educational expansion was not particularly responsive to the political, economic, and social characteristics of individual nation-states, instead it is based on a shared understanding of how the society should work. This explanation is questioned with methodological findings here. In the Kyrgyz higher education policy, the expansion of higher education is explained with national characters of the society, its cultural and historical features. The discourse of domestication are involved with an idea that the expansion of higher education is responding the national and societal needs. Islamic radicalization, geographical location, unemployment and political uncertainty are factors that justify expansion of higher education. Contrary to that debate, there is a discourse which explains the expansion of higher

education as a threat to national higher education success and quality. That discourse questioned the meaningfulness of national education policy that is trying to quantity instead of quality in higher education.

However, at the national level, the debate about the massification of the education is tamed to national features. The understanding of higher education is reproduced by national, cultural and historical discourses. From the perspective of domestication, the idea of global 'norm', are questioned. Qadir (2016) notes how the national policies of higher education are always national, without any global script that nation-states are following.

Also, on a larger scale, the national and cultural features of higher education are continuously discussed in the research data. The social reality of Kyrgyz society and higher education were linked together in discourses of higher education reforms. In the research data discussion of higher education reforms was linked with Kyrgyz national peculiarities, cultural characters and the role of the state in education policy. While all countries in Central Asia share a Soviet past, their post-independent transformation has followed essentially different paths. Chankseliani (2018, 282–283) divided Central Asian countries into four categories based on the classification by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU): a full democracy, a flawed democracy, a hybrid democracy or an authoritarian regime. Kyrgyzstan was the only Central Asian country to be identified as a hybrid democracy, while the other countries were authoritarian regimes.

In Kyrgyzstan, the ability of the central government to exert influence on many policy areas, including education, has been limited and donor-driven agendas have guided education reforms. In many senses, Kyrgyzstan is the most open country in Central Asia, where Western and European ideas and cultural imperatives have been accepted and accommodated more successfully than in other Central Asian countries.

However, some cultural peculiarities and national features dominate despite European reforms in Central Asia. For example, the prestige of a degree is highly appreciated everywhere in Central Asia, sometimes even more the knowledge. "In Tajik society, the prestige of a degree is far higher than the prestige of knowledge." Says the professor who explained why most of the students use bribes while studying at the universities (Eurasianet.org 2011).

In the research data, internationalization of the higher education sector was discussed through the connection between higher education and the labor market according to a number of factors. Public-private partnerships and developments in the systems of quality assurance and accreditation were reviewed from the perspective of labor market needs and the tendency to internationalize the higher education sector. Also, the different roles and responsibilities of the state, employers and higher education institutions were identified.

The Ministry of Education representatives were willing to boost programs that are of strategic importance for a country from the viewpoint of the labor market

and the knowledge economy and also to strengthen quality and close down poor performing universities through quality assurance instruments (e.g. law on independent accreditation). For universities, the labor market connection was a way to attract more students and to create a profile of the university as an international and advanced university. For some public universities, the labor market connection was far from the reality as for them, the role of the universities was to keep young people occupied for several years due the poor labor market conditions. Hundreds of thousands of young people are controlled through education. Also, one of the functions of education was to prevent conflicts, promote tolerance and further stability in the country.

Highlighting tolerance and promoting linguistic diversity is an important strategic choice behind the higher education policy of Kyrgyzstan. In the Central Asian context, Kyrgyzstan is the first parliamentary state and most open country in Central Asia. In connection with openness, Kyrgyzstan is an attractive platform for exported programs, students and international innovation. Among other Central Asian countries such as Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, presidents and their relatives enjoy unlimited power and almost total control over the societies. From that perspective, openness and 'west-mindedness' are also ways to reconstruct Kyrgyz identity and educational reforms. Being open to innovation and new approaches is not self-evident in Central Asia, and Kyrgyzstan is using that image among other Central Asian countries.

The transfer of global discourses may not necessarily involve transfer of education practices associated with them. Earlier studies on education transformation in post-socialist countries (see Silova 2002; Morley 2003 and Pursiainen & Medvedev 2005) have suggested that borrowing western discourses is used as a symbol of internationalization and progress and at the same time as a detaching from the Russian and Soviet structural, institutional and ethno-demographic legacies. For example, in the mid-2000s, researchers presented how Russian higher education policy is balanced with the national development needs and the desire to integrate with Europe. Pursiainen and Medvedev (2005, 21–24) have divided the interests behind the reforms of the Bologna Process (The Bologna declaration was signed in 2003) and Russian foreign policy interest and national interests.

According to Pursiainen and Medvedev (2005) the foreign policy interest is to modernize higher education and to integrate higher education with the information age and global market standards and requirements. National interests are related to the economic, social and administrative reforms in progress. Pursiainen and Medvedev (2005) pointed out that the foreign policy interests are also Russia's desire to engage in dialogue with the EU and to move towards from hard power to soft power. Looking at these data it is possible to notice Russian willingness to retain its distinctive education system, and increase its role as an education exporter to Central Asian countries and beyond (for example, Russian cooperation

agreement with World Bank for Russia Education Aid for Development, the READ, project) as well as create their own networks, which are based on global education ideals (for example the Eurasian Quality Assurance Network EAQA). Russia remains by far the most popular destination for degree-mobile students (Chankseliani 2018; Heyneman & Skinner 2014). Russia (243,752 mobile students) is also the fifth largest host country for international students after the United States (971,417 mobile students), Australia (381,202 mobile students), United Kingdom (432,001 mobile students) and Germany (244,575 mobile students) (UNESCO 2019). The number of students coming to study in Russia is growing, and in 2015 Russia was hosting 213,347 students (Chankseliani 2018).

Russia and the Kremlin's vision of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) as the Eurasian equivalent of the European Union might be an exaggeration, but it is undoubtedly the most comprehensive form of economic integration of the post-Soviet countries since the break-up of the Soviet Union. However, the way in which the integration process has been unfolding, as well as Russia's aggressive policy over the last year, are indications that the EEU has become primarily a political project, and the importance of its economic aspects has eroded. Russia is in a situation in which it wants to have partners outside Europe and for Central Asian countries such as Kyrgyzstan, there are few other options than looking for partnerships with Russia.

For example, one vice-rector of the Kyrgyz university pointed out how the older generation of educators still believe that Kyrgyzstan had the best education in the world during the Soviet time and for many it is still natural to look at the direction of Russian in the development of their own education system, because of the common language, history and cultural issues.

In the interviews, justifications for global quality assurance policies are also linked to national characteristics of the 'Kyrgyz mentality'. However, there were no mentions about cultural and national characteristics in the Education Development Strategy 2020 when the document provided explanations for need of the quality assessment and evaluation. Depending on who the document was written or and for whom interviews were given, justifications for higher education policy differ. These dimensions reflect the interests of different groups of actors and the assumed interests of the recipients of the information. These all aspects of discourses are part of the same higher education space, but they represent some historical, political and cultural features that differ from the next one. When actors from the universities justified the need for the quality assurance and evolution, they engaged their argumentation with the discourse of Kyrgyz mentality.

In conclusion, the discourse about 'modernization', 'quality' and 'international' are used in education policy documents and interviews to justify the local need for international reforms. It is possible to argue that the concept of modernization is used as a synonym for Western-oriented education reforms. As

opposed to the previous discourses, arguments supporting the doxa are conservative and tend to keep the situation as similar as possible. In the moment when the research data were collected, orthodoxa was justified with elements of historical, cultural and institutional developments of the higher education system.

Although, this study focuses on Kyrgyzstan similar research results would be possible to find other post-socialist countries as well. The interplay between the local and global becomes visible, when governments implement higher education reforms around the globe. The domestication approach and Bourdieu's field theory has potential to be utilized more widely to demonstrate how locality and national characters are constructed when local governments are borrowing global higher education reforms, or 'post-socialist reforms packages' (Steiner-Khamisi & Silova 2008).

## **7.2 Research Ethics and Evaluation of Research**

This sub-section provides a reflective perspective to this study of the domestication of travelling reforms in Kyrgyzstan. First, I will explain the ethical guidelines followed in this study, especially when conducting the empirical research data. Secondly, I will evaluate theoretical, methodological and empirical choices made in this study, present a critical perspective for reading the results and present the questions that arise from the process which could not be tackled within this study.

In conducting the study, I followed the ethical guidelines laid out by the National Advisory Board on Research Integrity (TENK 2009 & TENK 2012). In TENK (2012) the concept of research ethics is used as general term for all the ethical viewpoints and evaluations that are related to science and research. Throughout my study, I followed those guidelines but especially when conducting interviews, I was particularly aware of aspects of research ethics. This means that the whole process of conducting the interviews was carefully planned and informed about the purpose of the study for all parts during the process. Also, the anonymity of the respondents was ensured by removing direct references to people and their institution from the transcripts of interviews. Conducting interviews in a small country like Kyrgyzstan, in a specialized field of higher education, confidentiality of the respondents should be considered carefully. Thus, the organizations of the respondents are not recognizable from the interview transcripts. Even though I used the division between the public and private universities, the city of the university was removed from the interview transcript to ensure the anonymity.

TENK (2012) guidelines highlight that research is ethically acceptable only if its results are credible and the empirical data were used according to the responsible conduct of research. Conducting research in a foreign country, issues that affect the research are different than in one's country of origin. Prior to the

interviews, I carefully considered the aspects of cultural differences. Before starting the interview process, I was concerned about getting access to the research field. I previously lived in another Central Asian country, Uzbekistan, and I had done research interviews in Tajikistan 2013. When I applied for research permission to the authorities in Tajikistan, the Finnish Embassy in Kazakhstan sent an official note to the Ministry of Education in Tajikistan and supported my research permission application. In Kyrgyzstan, levels of bureaucracy were considerably lower. I approached the Ministry of Education in Kyrgyzstan with an official letter from the University of Helsinki before my first visit in which I explained my research objectives and asked for research permission. With help of Rashid Gabdulhakov, official letters delivered to the Ministry of Education and one week later they approved the implementation of my research. This strategy turned out to be in fa-vor of my later intentions to conduct interviews. There was a positive attitude towards my research plans and officials from the Ministry of Education helped me to organize meetings within the Ministry of Education.

For researchers conducting fieldwork in foreign societies with a foreign language, special care of potential cultural misunderstanding and linguistic competence need to consider carefully when interviewing native respondents. I made my first field trip to Kyrgyzstan in June–July 2015. During my first visit, I conducted the first five interviews and created important social contacts to ensure access to the field of research. Many of the interviews were secured through contacts by the Tempus Programme office in Kyrgyzstan. During the first visit, I met with people from the National Tempus Office in Kyrgyzstan and later they helped me to organize a second field trip in September 2015. The aim of the Tempus Programme office in Kyrgyzstan is to promote and to provide assistance in the integration of higher education in Kyrgyzstan with the European educational area. The National Tempus Office organized a meeting for me with 10 actors and representatives from universities in Bishkek, Osh and Karakol. To avoid a too congruent set of perspectives towards internationalization I agreed to conduct interviews with other universities that are important in relation to internationalization in Kyrgyzstan and were not on the list of the National Tempus Office.

In the Central Asian context, Kyrgyzstan has been the most open country for international cooperation. In the education sector, development assistance has been overwhelmingly provided by traditional bilateral and multilateral donors, which provided aid in specific ways and according to a set of norms. This softened my way to settle into the research field, because policymakers, university representatives and other staff I met during my fieldwork were used to working with foreigners, but it also caused problems about the relationship between the interview-ee and the interviewer. Even though I represented myself as a researcher from the university of Helsinki before meetings, in several situations, respondents acted as though they were responding to an inspector from an international



organization or a potential donor. Some of the interviewees were prepared for the interview by digging out some EU funded project action plans as evidence of their internationalization and were willing to take photographs of my stay at the institute. In some cases, interviewees provided the answers that they believed the interviewer wanted to hear and highlighted collaboration between the European Union and their institution. Overall, respondents were comfortable answering my questions and there were no concerns about the research content or interview framework. In two cases, respondents shared information which they did not want to include in the interview. Those parts of the interview have not been included into the interview transcript and the information they shared was included through alternative evidence (i.e. policy regulations and public debate).

There are no equivalent general guidelines for evaluating the quality of the findings in qualitative studies. The leading principle in qualitative research is to describe and understand the phenomenon to be investigated. Generalizing the qualitative findings by connecting them with previous research and thereby including them in wider discussions increases the credibility of research (Alasuutari 1994). Credibility guides the researcher to connect the research findings with reality to demonstrate the trustworthiness of the argument and findings of the study. TENK (2012) regulations advise researchers to articulate their findings in a way that the logical process of the research is visible and relations between the actual data, conclusions and the theoretical framing are explicit for a reader. The theoretical framework and research questions obviously evolved during the process, and this dissertation manuscript has been written so that the reader will get a coherent picture of the phenomenon that was studied to be able to evaluate the findings and decisions made in this study critically. Theoretical, methodological and empirical analysis have been described in detail to give readers a chance to view the logical procedure and make it transparent.

I am aware of my own position as a researcher (i.e. a member of academic community and foreign researcher), which has naturally influenced the way this research has evolved. My own experiences, understanding of the field of higher education and enthusiasm about the Central Asia region has developed and led me through this process. However, I am aware of the subjective nature of this study, I have seen myself as an interpreter of the analysis and the phenomenon of domestication of travelling reforms in Kyrgyzstan (see Saarinen 2011, 70).

As stated earlier, the present study is a result of a long process, during which the research purpose, theoretical methods and empirical solutions have evolved. This study has concentrated on discursive analysis of post-socialist higher education transformation process, which has not been studied widely. Continuation of a discursive viewpoint into higher education policy transformation could give an angle into the present global policy processes in the post-socialist space. By taking the domestication perspective into the adaptation of travelling reforms enables to analyze the transformation outside of the dichotomy of global and local. Anyhow,

the analysis has focused in the discursive construction of travelling reforms. In this context, future investigations will need to examine how and in what ways actors at the higher education institutions in Kyrgyzstan or in other post-socialist countries adopt, or go against, travelling reform practices at the university level. What kind of practices the domestication of travelling reforms will cause at the universities?

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# ANNEXES

## **Annex 1: Interview themes for actors on the higher education institutions**

### INTERVIEW GUIDELINE

#### **A Position: To understand the interviewee's concrete involvement and perceived impact on higher education policy and practise.**

1. Are you (or you organisation/university) indirectly/directly involved in the national policy-making?

#### **B International higher education policy. European Union.**

1. What are some of the most important reforms after the independency in Kyrgyzstan?
  - a. Who were the key-players behind these reforms?
  - b. What is the role of universities behind these reforms?
2. How do you understand the role of European Union in Kyrgyzstan education reforms?
  - a. How do the forces of international actors and national interest interact in Kyrgyzstan?
    - i. Is there a pressure to implement international educational reforms or whether this is jointly agreed?
3. From your university what are the most important problems and challenges for universities to meet requirements of international programs such as Bologna process? Why?

### **C International change.**

1. How would you explain the interaction between the society and universities?
2. How the role of universities have change during the independency?

### **D Actors: To understand which are the main actors in the field and their role/action and perceived impact in international higher education policy.**

1. Which actors would you consider the most important in shaping international reforms on higher education policy? Please describe who they are.

### **E Change: To understand what kind of role of international reforms such as Bologna process and quality evaluation practices and policies have played in the changes.**

1. Have there been changes in dealing with higher education problems after the independency? Why?
2. Who does push for changes? What are the main reasons?

### **F Quality: To understand the respondents view on quality and evaluation in higher education**

1. How do you understand 'quality in higher education'?
2. Should quality be assessed? Why
  - a. How do you see the relationship between 'quality' and 'evaluation'?
  - b. What is the role of European Union in quality evaluation system?
  - c. What mechanisms are in place at your university to control the quality of education?

## **G Future:**

1. How would you explain the education tradition in Kyrgyzstan? Are there any national peculiarities?
2. What are the most promising education reforms you support?
  - a. How do you see the future trajectories in higher education in short and long term?
  - b. Are these related to international higher education development?
3. Are there any features of higher education abroad that you would like to see in Kyrgyzstan?
  - a. And which characters of current higher education system you would like see also in future?
4. Is there something that we haven't even thought of asking, but you would like to admit to the conversation?

## **Annex 2: Interview themes for actors from the Ministry of Education / organizations**

### **INTERVIEW GUIDELINE**

#### **A Background**

2. How did you end up in working with these issues?
3. What are the main challenges in your own particular work/action?
4. From your perspective what are the most important problems and challenges for universities to meet requirements of international programs such as Bologna process? Why?

#### **B National Expert Group**

1. Whose initiative national expert group set up?
2. Could you describe selection process of the national experts? How they were selected?
3. Whether this selection process or the national expert has been criticised?
4. What is the main goal behind this group?

### **C Universities and the Ministry of education**

1. From your perspective by whom Bologna process and international reforms started to be implemented?  
The Ministry of Education have stressed their importance behind of these reforms, that they were the driving force behind these reforms. When again the universities have stressed their importance in this process, how reforms started from the bottom up.

### **D Interaction between the actors**

3. How would you explain the interaction between the society and universities?
4. How universities have change during the independency?
5. Who would you describe cooperation between the ministry and universities?

### **E European Union.**

1. How do you understand the role of European Union in Kyrgyzstan education reforms?
  - a. How do the forces of international actors and national interest interact in Kyrgyzstan?
    - i. Is there a pressure to implement international educational reforms or whether this is jointly agreed?
2. What are some of the most important reforms after the independency in Kyrgyzstan?
  - a. Who were the key-players behind these reforms?
  - b. What is the role of universities behind these reforms?
  - c. Are there differences in opinion between the different actors involved?

**F Future.**

5. How would you explain the education tradition in Kyrgyzstan? Are there any national peculiarities?
6. What are the most promising education reforms you support?

**G Quality.**

3. How do you understand 'quality in higher education'?
4. Should quality be assessed? Why
  - a. How do you see the relationship between 'quality' and 'evaluation'?
  - b. What is the role of European Union in quality evaluation system?
  - c. What mechanisms are in place at your university to control the quality of education?

### Annex 3: Coding of the research data

The coding used in the interview data is following:

<i>Groups</i>	<i>Character of the group</i>	<i>Number of the interview</i>
Organization	A.	No 16, No 17, No 19
Higher education institutions	B.1. (Public universities)	No 1, No 4, No 5, No 6, No 11, No 12
	B.2. (Private Universities)	No 2, No 3, No 7, No 8, No 9, No 10, No 13, No 15
National Team of Experts	C.	No 1, No 4, No 13, No 15
Ministry of Education	D.	No 14, No 18

Some of the interviews are divided into several groups. For example, interview Number 13 belongs to both group of private universities and the group of National Team of Experts.